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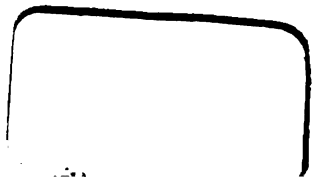

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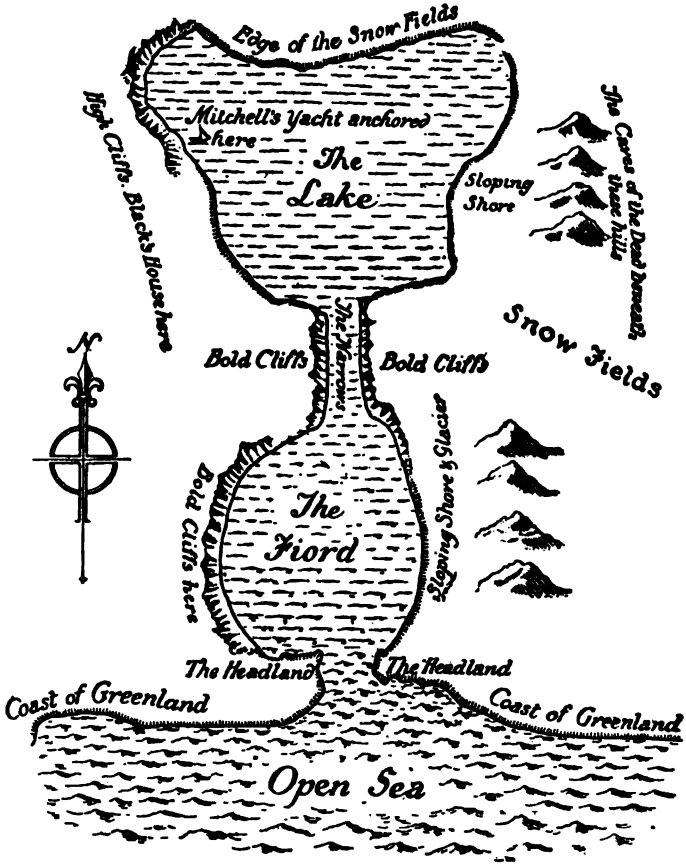

CAPTAIN BLACK

A Romance of The Nameless Ship

BY

MAX PEMBERTON

AUTHOR OF "THE IRON PIRATE,"
ETC. ETC.

HODDER & STOUGHTON

NEW YORK

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To

A. A.

"The Sea appears all golden,
Beneath the sunlit sky."

Heine.

FOREWORD

It is nineteen years since Captain Black first sailed from Spezzia upon the Nameless Ship, and taught the world the meaning of the new piracy. A gigantic hull of phosphor bronze harboured the gas-engines by which the great vessel was driven; an inlet upon the shores of Greenland, known as Ice Haven, received the treasure and the ship when the Governments of the world awoke to the truth. Black and his men fell by a great mischance, and rumour said that he was dead. The ship that he built, then derided by the experts, is the ship of the new century, and the yards are already resounding with the bruit of a copy which shall be driven by oil-engines and banish steam from the high seas.

The Nameless Ship was sunk in the Atlantic; but the man who commanded her did not die. Just as, twenty years ago, he taught the experts what the naval battle of the future must be, so now it is possible that they may learn a further lesson from this new record of his daring. Possessed of a submarine, which would seem to embody the dreams of the scientist, the great Captain sails the seas to-day. Whatever mad impulse may lie at the back of his emprise, whatever gospel of plunder may excuse his

assault upon the commerce of the world, the fact remains that no wit has yet been able to ensnare him, no ship to make him captive.

Deep down in the heart of the ocean, the pirate lies. The dogged persistence of the youth, Mark Strong, whose life the Captain spared, has permitted this further account of him to come into my hands. It is the story of the treasure which Black amassed when the Nameless Ship was the mistress of the ocean and the cities echoed the seamen's fables and learned at last that they were true. At the bidding of one man's voice, the nineteenth century came to understand the peril of the deep as the seventeenth century had known it. Shall we say, while Black lives, that our own age has less to fear from such a menace and may despise it?

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CAPTAIN BLACK

CAPTAIN BLACK

CHAPTER I

THE HUNCHBACK OF DOLPHIN'S COVE

I DO not know that I could begin to tell you of Captain Black's treasure upon any better day than the one which brought the lame seaman to Dolphin's Cove in Cornwall. This filled me with so many doubts about the voyage that I was upon the point of regretting we had planned it at all.

We were to weigh anchor with the tide about ten o'clock that night. The old yacht, the *Celsis*, glorious in her shining brass and new white paint, then lay in the river below the very windows of the little house wherein I had spent so many happy months since the Nameless Ship brought me fame and fortune. I waited but for my friend Roderick Stewart and his madcap sister Mary: and when the train carried them from town, England would know me no more for many months. So you will imagine what I thought of it when old Nick Venning, the village constable, came stumbling up the steps from the harbour mole to tell me of three strange men at

"The Falmouth Arms," and of what they had been doing and what they had been saying — to the great scandal and surprise of the simple folk round about.

"You'll niver have heard of such a thing, Master Mark," says he — I don't suppose old Nicholas would know me by any other name, though he has carried up many a letter addressed to Mark Strong, Esq. — "you'll never have heard of such a thing. Three of them are together at 'The Falmouth Arms,' and Tom Benson at his wits' end to save the mugs in the bar-parlour. Strange folk all, and overmuch of the tarry sort to my way of thinking. Would you ever guess, now, what they said to me? Do you think you could guess that?"

I was cleaning my rifles at the moment, and I had a splendid new .450 bore in my hand while I stood at the door and talked with the old fellow.

"No, really," said I, "I don't think I could guess it, Nick."

"That you never would, Master Mark, nor any proper gentleman neither. I had addressed but a civil word to them, when the leader, a lame man with a single eye, cried, 'Ahoy, old Thunder, and what monkey-house let you loose?' To me, sir, who have been constable of this parish off and on for more than forty years."

I would not let old Nick see me laughing, and so I turned my face from him to ask a question:

"Where do they hail from, Nick? Some ship in Falmouth, I suppose?"

"And a precious queer sort of ship, Master Mark, and a crew we can very well dispense with. If I judge by their songs they are rascally Americans every one."

I looked up at this, interested perhaps for the first time.

"Their songs, Nick — oh, they carol in their cups, then?"

"Indeed and they do so — some nonsense about Boston town and pistols three and other silly stuff a grown man has no patience to speak about. It's my opinion they'll burn the inn down before nightfall. I should be wanting in my duty if I did not express that opinion."

"Then," said I shortly, "the opinion is expressed, Nick, and I am the witness. And if opinions will do them any good, which seems unlikely, observing their condition, I will put it down upon paper and you may sign it. Now, seriously, my good fellow, what do you want me to do?"

"Why, Master Mark, to step down to 'The Falmouth Arms' yourself and to tell me if I should be wise to send to the town for help or to leave it where it is. You are a gentleman, and will know what to make of it better than we poor folk who see so little company. Why, sir, you can hear them singing for yourself if you will come to the stairs' head with

me. Did mortal man ever hear a song which spoke so surely of the devil as that?"

He took me by the lapel of the coat and led me across the terrace on the cliff-side to the head of the steep flight of wooden stairs by which you go down to the harbour of Dolphin's Cove. It was about three o'clock of an April afternoon, the sun shining aslant across the headland at the river's mouth and a warm glow upon the bright red roofs and stone facings of the cottages below. Looming large above this was the two-gabled building they called "The Falmouth Arms," and I could see a crowd of the meaner sort before its doors and perceive very plainly that something more than a common affair had called the people from the ships and the houses. But it was the talk of the song which impelled me chiefly; and although I would not have confessed all my thoughts to Nick Venning for a thousand guineas, they were wild thoughts none the less.

Well, we stood a little while upon the platform at the stairs' head, and, sure enough, the strangers, who had come to the cove, seemed in no mind to leave it. I heard a shout of laughter from the inn; then a great crash of glass or china, as though all host Benson's mugs had come tumbling down together; upon which a pewter pot came flying out of the window like a cannon shot, and immediately afterward a brawny, sun-tanned seaman showed himself at the door, and made a pass with a monstrous clasp-

knife which scattered the honest folk and sent them running along the quay as though the devil had been at their heels.

"Now look at that, Master Mark; please to look at that!" cried Nick Venner at the sight. "In the daytime, too, and no excuse of what a man might do who had taken a glass with his supper. Did anyone ever hear of such behaviour in an honest township before? Upon my word, they deserve the lock-up if ever rogues did!"

I had it upon my tongue to suggest that they were unlikely people to submit to the lock-up quietly; but I did not tell him so, for the tarry seaman had gone into the inn again by this time, and I could hear him singing with as much music as a bull that bellows in a byre. Vainly I listened for any word of a song which would awaken those wild and whirling thoughts Nick Venning had aroused with his talk of Boston town. But they were bawling a common chantey, such as seamen lift at the capstan; and presently the song died away altogether, and you might have been unaware that the rogues were in the town at all.

"Well," said I, "there is a truce, at any rate. Let's go down and have a look at them, Nick. A cat may look at a king, you know; and these fellows hardly have a regal appearance. Did they come in a boat, by the way, or walk across the cliff? You didn't tell me that, Nick."

I began to go down the stairs as I spoke, and he followed after me with less majesty than the law might have desired. I could see he had no stomach for the job at the inn, and I laughed at his perplexity. When he told me that the three men had come into the cove in a ship's launch, apparently of French build, and that they had put all sorts of questions to host Benson concerning the yacht and our voyage, he interested me more than he knew. But I said very little about it, and when we arrived at the inn I went in immediately and hailed old Tom as though nothing whatever were the matter.

"Good afternoon, Benson, and what's fresh to-day?" I asked him. Whimsically enough, he replied that the three seamen in the kitchen parlour were fresh. "Though that's a manner of speaking," he added, "for a dirtier lot I never clapped eyes upon."

"Oh," said I, "then they are making themselves at home, are they? Have you learned where they hail from, Tom?"

He laughed gruffly, pulling at the stubbly beard on his chin, and seeming to think about it. "Most likely part of a ship's crew out of Falmouth, sir — come along for a bit of a spree, and having of it surely. Why, they broke two windows, to say nothing of dancing with the kitchen clock before they'd drunk the first round. I niver see such folk."

"Ah," said I, "faint hearts never won fair ladies

— it's Martha, the cook, that's doing it, Tom. Who knows but what you'll have a marrying before nightfall? Well, stranger things might happen — and I'll just have a peep at them through the window if you don't think they'll see me."

"No fear of that, sir," said he; "they see nothing but the bottom of a mug." And with that he led me to the private parlour where a little glass window gave upon the kitchen, and I could see two of the men as plainly as though I sat beside them.

They were an odd contrast; one a great burly fellow, full six feet in height, with a face of leather and many a scar for its ornament — a full, round man, with a bully's countenance and a bully's manner of raising his voice and then listening to hear if he were contradicted; the other, a little fellow who had the air and nice deportment of a Frenchman — but a very dirty one and by no means a beauty. This "Froggy," as host Benson called him in a whisper, drank brandy out of an old-fashioned beer glass, while the tall man's fancy was for gin and porter, of which he drank prodigious draughts, shouting his questions between-whiles and hardly waiting for any one to answer them. The third of the trio I could not see, for a corner of the counter hid him from my sight; but plainly some deference was paid to him, both by the big and the little man; and I did not fail to remark that even the bully dropped his eyes when he happened to turn them in that direction.

"In 'seventy-eight it were, by —," the fellow bawled as I came in. "I tell you the ship put out from Savannah with a crew of forty-five, and she fired off Cape Lookout ten days afterward. I was bos'un and Dave Starlight second officer. Him and me stood by when all the boys went over, and sailed her into Chesapeake Bay, by thunder. There aren't a man, livin' or dead, of you lousy lot of Britishers as could do the same, not nohows, so help me. Show me the man as could do it, and I'll knock his —— head off. Does he stand in this dive? — no, he don't, nor anywheres else that I can see. Then, why for deny it, mates, when argiment ain't in question?"

He banged his pot upon the table and looked round about him fiercely enough. To my surprise and also to my annoyance, he was answered almost immediately, not by one of his own fellows, but by Bill Eightbells, promoted to be third officer of the *Celsis*, and as smart a seaman as ever trod ship's deck. I had not seen Billy come into the room, and I was the more astonished when he pushed his way up to the counter and, calling for a glass of beer, turned upon the bully:

"Why, I denies it, then; and what now, matey?"

The big fellow seemed taken all aback at this, and began to lick his lips as cowards will when they are pressed.

"Oh, you denies it, do you? And who the hell may you be, matey?"

Billy took up his glass of beer and answered him over his shoulder:

"Same as you were asking for, and not to be put out by no thin-gutted Yankee whatsoever."

He finished his ale and went to turn away. At the same moment the bully snatched up a wooden stool and aimed such a blow at Billy's head that he would have been a dead man there and then had it gone home. Billy, however, was not so unready as he seemed. He had closed with the big man and tripped him up before you could count two — and then we heard a thud as the fellow's head struck the flags, and for some minutes he lay insensible.

"There," says Billy, who had not turned a hair, "sail that into Chesapeake Bay — by thunder," and he hitched up his breeches and was about to leave the place without more ado, when the little Frenchman, hitherto a silent spectator of the scene, suddenly intervened with a ferocity quite unnatural. No wild cat could have fought with tooth and claw more horribly. I swear he fixed his teeth in poor Billy's arm and almost made them meet, while you could see his hands tearing at the throat as a leopard may tear at the throat of a sheep. Poor Billy would have told no more yarns of what happened to him at "eight bells" but for an ally as fearful as his help was unexpected. He was no other than the third of the strangers, the man hidden from my eyes by the

corner of the counter, but now suddenly revealed at the top of the brawl.

Let me try to describe this uncouth figure, for we are to meet him again under circumstances very different. Perhaps not more than four feet in height, he was a hunchback, and had but a single eye — one which shone red enough to have been the eye of Polyphemus if it had been in the middle of his forehead. Ridiculously short in the legs, his arms were as ridiculously long — and, but for its deformity, his face might have been that of a child. But what was the more extraordinary thing was his personal strength, for no sooner had he determined to intervene in his shipmate's quarrel than he lifted Billy Eightbells and the Frenchman in his arms together and just dashed them to the ground as though they had been two dogs fighting. And when this was done, he fell to kicking his own man round and round the room as one would kick a ball for sport, and at every kick he cried, "Land Ho! Land Ho!" for all the world like a man at a masthead who sights a distant shore.

This unexpected turn did much to reassure Tom Benson, who had begun to fear that blood would be shed in his house. Billy Eightbells was soon upon his legs again, laughing at the Frenchman in spite of his hurt; while as for the bully, he had recovered his wits by this time, and roared like a bull at his friend's predicament. For myself, I must confess that the affair seemed just a tavern brawl in which

I had no interest whatever; and, contenting myself by telling Nick Venning to keep an eye upon the strangers, I followed our man Billy to the street and soon came up with him.

"Well, Billy," said I, "and so it was not at eight bells this time. Did he hurt you, man? Did he really bite you?"

Billy pulled at the black curl above his forehead as though it had been a bell-rope, and then rolled back his shirt from his brawny arm to show me the place. As sailors will be, he was proud of the little trickle of blood upon the flesh, and pleasured, I am sure, that I should see the full-rigged ship in sail which was tattooed just above the elbow.

"Why, sir," says he, wiping off the blood with his fingers, "I can't deny that I have felt the edge of his teeth, but, to be sure, I wouldn't go for to begrudge him a little cold meat. 'Tis a way they have in his country, I'm told, and likely for a hungry people who don't think overmuch of the galley fire. Put a bit of a ring about that and a pinch of gunpowder, and it would make a mighty fine picture of a wheel-house, you'll admit. Why, I mind Jim Kerrymore, of the *Baltic*, who tattooed hisself, aloft and alow, by letting of the skipper's retriever bite him properly and rubbing it in with gunpowder. That was a pretty fancy, same as this here will be when it's cooled a bit."

Billy's yarns always amused me; but I wanted to

talk to him about the men, and so I went on with a question.

"Where did they come from, Billy — what wind blew them on this shore?" I asked. He scratched his head first and then shook it sagely.

"As rum a bit of a ship's launch as ever turned an honest sailor into a merman. They must have sailed it round from Falmouth Harbour, though why they came so far to wet their whistles, the Lord only knows, sir."

"Is the boat warped hereabouts, Billy?"

"Right yonder aginst the timber wharf, sir; you can see it if you step through the yard."

I said I would do so, and he led the way, putting questions concerning our own cruise as he went, and mighty anxious, I could see, to learn both the name of our destination (if he could) and the purport of our voyage. These, however, we had kept from the crew, for to speak of treasure is to speak of danger, and it was an early day to think of that.

"So Mr. Stewart comes aboard to-night, sir?" Billy remarked. I said that he did.

"And Miss Mary, axing your pardon, she'll be sailing with us likewise, I am told?"

"Yes, Billy; Miss Mary's coming —— "

He nodded his head.

"'Twill likely be a pleasure cruise entirely, then, sir?"

"Yes, I hope it will be that, Billy."

"And plenty of blankets to keep our noses from getting red, sir? That's what the men are saying."

"And right enough, too, Billy. We're going up to Greenland, so red would never match the colour of the shore. Now, show me the boat; or is that it lying there?"

He said that it was, and led me down to the little mole which juts out from the timber yard. Here a boat, in shape like a river skiff, but with plenty of freeboard and high in the bows, had been warped to a post. I perceived in a moment that it was unlike any ship's boat I had seen before, being entirely shaped of steel and apparently collapsible, the sections fitting one within the other. There were no oars in it, nor any sign of the way it had been propelled from Falmouth to Dolphin's Cove, but I observed that the stern was covered in by a light aluminium casing and I had more than a suspicion that electricity was the agent.

This, however, I could not prove, for hardly had I taken up my stand at the mole when I heard a shrill sound of whistling, very familiar to me, and almost immediately upon this a lank and stooping seaman, with as lantern-jawed a face as ever I clapped eyes upon, came across the yard and asked us in broken English what we were about.

And in that instant I knew how falsely I had answered Bill Eightbells, and how full of danger our voyage in the *Celsis* must be.

CHAPTER II

THE LAST OF THE STRANGERS

If ever I was sure of anything in my life, it was that I had seen the lanky seaman before; though under what circumstances I could not remember.

It may be that I was frightened to recall them, and that I knew from the first that the fellow had been one of Captain Black's servants at Ice Haven. Our courage plays strange tricks with us sometimes, and this may have been one of them. It was better to tell myself that the man was a stranger to me than to re-live scenes of horror which could still haunt me in my sleep. So I put him out of my mind and went back to clean my rifles just as though nothing had happened.

I say that I did this, and yet any one who has ever stood upon the threshold of adventure will know how ill it was done. Turn to this occupation or that as I might, I could not forget that we set out at four bells, and that many months might pass before I should see the white cliffs of England again. Ever before me was a picture of the great white land and of the treasure beckoning me. If I feared, it was not fear of the living, but of the dead, which troubled

me. The spirit of the dauntless Captain hovered about this new emprise; his image, re-created by my dreams, called me back to the high seas that I might make reparation in his name. For was I not going to the land of silence, to the mighty arctic citadel he had set up above the kingdom of the snows, to recover the treasure he had amassed, and to put to shame those who had sought for it in vain? And were we not to sail with the tide, and would not the new day find us upon the broad of the ocean which Captain Black, the dead pirate, had ruled so terribly in the years of his dominion?

Well, I thought about all this, as you may imagine, while I counted the lagging hours of that sunny afternoon and waited, almost with a child's impatience, for Roderick and his sister Mary. When six o'clock struck, and I heard the wheels of the dogcart which was to take me to the station to meet them, I could have cut capers for very gratitude to the old time-piece in the corner of the room. Better still was the moment which set them down upon the platform at the junction: Roderick yawning, as usual; Mary as radiant as a rose in a Devonshire lane.

We shook hands heartily enough, Roderick with his, "Well, here we are," Mary with a complaint upon his laziness. "He's never opened his eyes since we left Paddington," she said; and I could well believe her. Roderick Stewart would go to sleep upon the block, as I once told him. His

answer was that he could not imagine a better thing to do.

It was nearly dark when we reached Dolphin's Cove, and the anchor light of the *Celsis* welcomed us brightly at the river's mouth. Here and there a candle twinkled in a cottage; but full a half of the meagre population appeared to have gathered about the doors of "The Falmouth Arms," and so I judged that my three friends from the high seas were still in the town.

I had just made up my mind to tell Roderick the whole story at dinner when out he came with a piece of news not less remarkable than my own.

"Did you see to-night's papers?" he asked almost in a whisper, while Mary ran on before us into the hall. I told him not be an ass, for what do we know of "to-night's" papers at such a place as Dolphin's Cove?

"Well," he rejoined quite coolly, "then you've missed something, my boy. Osbart's escaped from Parkhurst, and that's just all about it."

"Fine news entirely," said I, for I would not have him see how grave I thought it. "When did he escape, Roderick?"

"Last night, at six o'clock, after murdering one warder and nearly killing another. They don't know how he got away unless he had a boat waiting. Isn't it a coincidence that it should happen on the eve of our voyage?"

"If it is a coincidence," said I, and no more; for

Mary ran out at the moment to tell me that the drawing-room piano was no place for my sea-boots, and that I ought to be ashamed of myself — which I have to be about twenty times a day when she is in command of the ship. My confession of repentance was cut short upon this occasion by the intimation that dinner was already on the table, and we went in immediately, glad, perhaps, to hide what we really felt; as hide it we must from the little mistress of the house.

You will have remembered Doctor Osbart, the mad Osbart of Captain Black's most wonderful ship. He was the first man I met when Black carried me a prisoner to Ice Haven, and the only one of that pirate crew who was caught by the police in London. His trial had been one of the sensations of the year; they charged him, not with piracy upon the high seas, but with a murder committed many years ago in a country town near Shrewsbury, and, a little to the surprise both of the judge and the police, the jury found him insane, and he was sent to a criminal lunatic asylum.

Oddly enough, I had received a letter from Osbart just a couple of months ago, and directly I opened it I knew that Roderick and I must put to sea again and seek to do what others, even our own Admiralty, had failed to do. That task was to regain Captain Black's treasure — the fabulous treasure of which all the world had heard.

And now the Doctor had escaped from prison and was on the high seas once more; while, as I believed, one of Black's very crew caroused at the inn below our windows in the company of rogues who, if they escaped the gallows, certainly did not deserve to do so.

You may well imagine how these thoughts stirred my pulse while Mary babbled of the yacht and the cruise, and Roderick yawned his miserly replies. The scenes they conjured up — scenes of the golden ship and the great silent ocean, and the world of snows; hours of terror and of dread; acts of death and cruelty and despair. All these passed through my mind while I tried to tell Mary that her cabin was "a dream," and that old Dan, the seaman, had been asking after her good health. But I was a thousand miles from Dolphin's Cove in my heart, and I think that the voice of the dead Captain rang loud in my ears. Indeed, it needed an effort to hide the truth from Mary at all.

"Oh," she would cry, "what dreadful men! One says 'I think so,' and the other 'Certainly.' For the last time, Mark, is Billy Eightbells on board or is he not?"

"Why," said I, "where could Billy be when you are here, Mary? Poor Billy, the little lamb. 'And everywhere that Mary went — just at eight bells — the bos'n he would go.' By the way, though, Billy is third officer now, and he celebrated the occasion by nearly getting strangled this morning." And then

Mary ran out at the moment to tell me that the drawing-room piano was no place for my sea-boots, and that I ought to be ashamed of myself — which I have to be about twenty times a day when she is in command of the ship. My confession of repentance was cut short upon this occasion by the intimation that dinner was already on the table, and we went in immediately, glad, perhaps, to hide what we really felt; as hide it we must from the little mistress of the house.

You will have remembered Doctor Osbart, the mad Osbart of Captain Black's most wonderful ship. He was the first man I met when Black carried me a prisoner to Ice Haven, and the only one of that pirate crew who was caught by the police in London. His trial had been one of the sensations of the year; they charged him, not with piracy upon the high seas, but with a murder committed many years ago in a country town near Shrewsbury, and, a little to the surprise both of the judge and the police, the jury found him insane, and he was sent to a criminal lunatic asylum.

Oddly enough, I had received a letter from Osbart just a couple of months [illegible] I knew that Rob[illegible] I spent and seek to do wh[illegible] had failed to [illegible] Black's t[illegible]

it was, his appearance seemed the most natural thing in the world, and I was glad to know that he had a couple of the coastguards at his back. His news was just as serious as it could be; and, as though to make it good, what should happen but that the searchlight of our own yacht was turned presently upon the rioters, and we saw the thing as clear as day — the houses hanging to the face of the cliff, the silver waters of the river, the old wharves and ships, and, right below us, the black surging crowd about the doors of "The Falmouth Arms." Then Nick Venning spoke:

"There's been murder done, gentlemen," he cried, gasping for breath at every word. "The tall man they call Red Roger has sent poor Harry Tebbott to his last account, God help him. I am powerless; I can do nothing, nor nobody else, so if you would come down, Master Mark, and if Mr. Stewart would come —— "

I said we would go immediately, and getting a pair of pistols from the case of arms I had been cleaning during the afternoon, I told Mary to wait for us at the window, and bade Roderick follow me. There's no gamer fellow in a fight, I must say, nor one more wideawake when danger is about. The pair of us were out of the house and down the stairs almost before little Mary had begun to protest against our going at all.

Now, we had many friends at Dolphin's Cove,

although I had not been the owner of the little house above the harbour for a full year yet. The people I think, had ceased to look upon me as a "foreigner," and I was always sure of a warm welcome from them. So you will understand that my appearance among them upon this occasion was altogether to their satisfaction. On every side I heard confirmation of Nicky Venning's story. Harry Tebbott had told the man called Red Roger that "they didn't want no American fibbilusterers" (he meant filibusters) "on this side of the Atlantic," and the bully had replied by striking him insensible with a quart pot. As it chanced, two of our own crew were at the inn when the thing was done — and, be sure, they set to work to repair the mischief. Planks, the carpenter, had broken a mug of ale over Red Roger's head; while Cuss-a-lot, the cook, had greased the Frenchman's hair with some lard he happened to be taking back to the ship. Thenceforth riot and, in a way, pillage ensued. All the windows of the inn had been broken; Tom Benson was in the back parlour with a pair of eyes he dare not show in church for a month; Nick himself had been thrown clean through the window on to the quay (the poor fellow confessed as much to me), and, in short, as Mat Dolling, the fisherman, said, "If the sodgers weren't fetched from Truro there wouldn't be a dog with a whole tail on him by midnight."

And all this, mark you, done by three strangers,

come none knew whence, and bound for a port ws nameless. I would have laughed in the faces of the terrified fellows who told me the story if I had not seen the thing for myself. Yet there it was before ny eyes. The inn besieged; the man Red Roger swearing death and damnation to all who came near; the Frenchman grinning at the window like a monkey; but more terrible than all, the one-eyed hunchback right astride the sign above the inn door, and there threatening that he would shoot the first man who stirred a step to take him.

"By all that's holy, Roderick," said I, "but this is a pretty mess. The fellow has a pistol in his hand."

"And a real pistol, moreover."

"Of course it is; and some one will have a real bullet inside him by and by. What on earth's to be done? What does Nick Venning say?"

Nick Venning said very little. A terrier invited to tackle a boar at bay could not have liked the job less.

"I'll have to telegraph to Falmouth for help, gentlemen, that's what I'll have to do," he stammered.

"By which time the lot of them will be on board their own ship," said I.

"And what's left of the inn will be good for firewood," chimed in Roderick.

Two or three men round about laughed aloud at this, but none of them had a suggestion to offer. Those in the forefront of the crowd were chiefly our

own crew, liking the pistol but little and prudent enough to keep at a safe distance until a course should be resolved upon. When I shouted over to them to come round to the back of the house and see if we could not get at the fellow that way, they responded with a hearty "Ay, ay, sir," but before the thing could be done we heard the thundering voice of our own skipper, and turned with real relief to welcome Captain York.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said he; "and what have we here, if you please?"

Some one has said that it would require an earthquake, a volcano, and a whirlpool to disturb the equanimity of that grizzled, silent man, who has been our friend of the high seas these many years. Of all the honest seamen I have known, give me John Rawdon York as the true comrade of a dangerous hour. But here he stood beside us, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his pilot coat, and his eyes twinkling merrily while he watched the affray.

"Why, Captain," said I, "but this is fortunate. I thought you were coming from Falmouth by the last train."

"The launch brought me," said he dryly. And then I told him about the men.

"Oh," says he, "some dirty foreigners from the Russian tramp that put into Falmouth yesterday. We'll teach 'em manners, gentlemen, I think." And

then he roared an order to his men, and you could have heard his voice across the harbour bar.

"*Celsis* ahoy! Some of you get down and stove in their boat; sharp about it, my lads."

Well, it was a fine idea to be sure; and, as is the case with all fine ideas, we fell to wondering why we had not thought of it before. As for the crew, they took up the cry with wild delight, and presently there were twenty running across to the timber-yard; while the poor folk, who were afraid to go, encouraged then by shouts which cost them little. As for the rest of us, I think we would have followed immediately to the water's edge but for the horrible hunchback who sat athwart the sign above the inn door and defied any man to approach him. Grown bold at his advantage, and seeing the most part of his besiegers gone down to the boat, this fellow suddenly leapt down from his perch like a cat, and charged head downward at the amazed spectators, whose ranks opened to let him pass, and were as quickly shut again. Immediately upon which a sharp rifle fire was to be heard from the timber-yard, and even Captain York stirred his steps at that.

"One rat at a time, and the water-rats first!" cried he. "Come along, gentlemen; yonder gallows-bird will find no safe perch if he don't make the boat. We'll head him off, if you please." And he began to run with the odd rolling gait of the true seaman that he was. Of course, we followed him, and our

excitement getting the better of us, we raced together to the quay, in time to see the strange boat well on its way to the harbour bar, and three of its crew of four mocking the fellows who gaped after them.

"Too late, by St. Christopher," panted Captain York, as he rolled up to our side. But there was no need to tell us that; the rogues had bested the honest men and were already on their way to Falmouth. I could have laughed at Billy Eightbells as he made his apologies.

"A gun it were that did it, gentlemen," says he in his odd way; "that there tarry Russian had a Winchester, or I never see the shape of one. There's a man shot in the starboard quarter and two or three more as don't know whether they've got lead in 'em or not. A bad business, Captain, and naught but the chap with the binnacle light in his topknot who'll answer for it. But, please God, we'll take him — unless he's swum to Falmouth, which ain't natural nohow."

We said that it was not; and, in truth, the whole affair was plain enough. The great Russian in charge of the strange launch had fired upon the townsfolk as they came up, bringing the mob instantly to a halt, and daunting even our own seamen. As for the bully and the Frenchman, no doubt they had mingled with the crowd when it set out, and, taking advantage of the sudden halt, they boldly ran to their boat, leaving the hunchback ashore, and

perhaps glad to be quit of him. And now the three of them were out on the broad of the sea, and we might as well cry for the moon as for the hope of taking them.

"It's all up, Captain," said I, turning sorrowfully to our skipper; "they're across the bar by this time and laughing at us, you may be sure. We ought to have thought of their boat before."

"Oh," says the Captain, "it's the boats I'm thinking about still." And then, wheeling round, he roared, as though he were on his own bridge, "Hands for the launch — brisk, my lads." And we were all running back again to the inn before you could have counted ten.

Now, in a way it was fortunate that the Captain had come over from Falmouth by our own launch rather than by train; for there she lay at the quayside, steam hissing from her valves, and her lanterns burning brightly. She was a new launch, one of the smartest Devonport could turn out, and she would do sixteen knots on any fair sea. We bought her because we thought she would be useful in the creeks and fiords of Ice Haven, where the treasure lies; and it was odd that the first real service she must do was the pursuit of the drunken seamen who had terrorized our simple folk at Dolphin's Cove. Such, however, was the fact; and when we had boarded her and were racing out to sea, then, for a truth, the old spirit of adventure breathed upon me again, and I would not have turned back for a fortune.

It was a dull night, starry wastes and dark clouds above, and a fretful swell below. We rose to a heavy sea as we crossed the harbour bar, and for a little while thereafter steamed in black darkness. That the fugitives could hold a course to Falmouth Light was not to be doubted, and it seemed to us that, even if we passed them on the way, we should take them before they could board the Russian ship. Our own course was two points west of south, and this we held for some fifteen minutes, after which time the clouds lifted without warning, and a flood of moonlight showed us "the pirates" already far out to sea and apparently making, not for Falmouth, but for the French coast.

"Are they out of Cherbourg, do you think?" I asked the skipper. He answered me by saying "Helm up" to the watch; and in the same instant the launch came round.

"Cherbourg or Devilsbourg, I'm after them," says he. "There's been murder done down yonder, and it's our duty to go. You've nothing to say against it, gentlemen, I hope?"

"So little, Captain," cried Roderick, "that I will give five pounds a-piece to the men if we take them."

"Then full steam ahead," roars Captain York, "and luck go with us."

We were in for it now, as you may suppose, and our hearts beating finely, as young hearts ever will

when there are pursuers and pursued. What business we had to be out there in the open at such a time of night, why we took upon our shoulders duties which the police of Falmouth and of Cherbourg might have performed so much better, I make no pretence to say. Let it stand that the good launch went racing through the ugly seas as though she understood the game, and that we stood aft as the skipper commanded, and cried the news from man to man with voices that rose or fell to exultation or despair.

We were gaining; we were losing; they would escape in the darkness; the moonlight would undo them. And so it went on until our prospects became apparent beyond all doubt, and we knew that another half-hour of it would bring us up with the men and answer the question for good and all.

"We'll run alongside and make fast, gentlemen," said the skipper at this time. "If Mr. Mark will be good enough to cover the scoundrels with the gun, I will answer for the rest. You others get what shelter you can. There's been one murder done, and there'll be another if we ask for it. Now, steady there with that wheel, and one point starboard when I give the word."

The watch answered "Ay, Ay," and the hands, very ready to profit by the warning, began to stow themselves with what wit they could. My own place was just abaft the funnel, where I had good shelter of a kind, and could answer for the man with

the gun as the skipper wished. Roderick squatted by me, while the Captain himself, disdaining to take any cover whatever, stood near by and waited silently. And this was how the affair was going, every man high-strung, the strange launch some half a mile away on the starboard bow, the moon a little clouded over, the swell much abated, our hopes of a capture running wild — this, I say, is how the affair was going when the strange thing happened, and both the men and the boat were gone from our sight in a twinkling, as though the sea herself had opened and swallowed them up.

It began, I should tell you, with a shrill siren, blown by no steamer that we could see, and so awesome and mysterious that even the hands were cowed by it. For myself, I had but to hear it to be set all a shudder with my memories; just as I had been upon that unforgotten night at Ice Haven when Black had murdered his prisoners and filled anew the desolate land with desolation. Now, as then, the siren echoed as a very death cry across the waste of waters; now, as then, it seemed to speak of human suffering and human cruelty in a voice that almost chilled the heart. And I must hear it and be afraid to utter a word lest just ridicule overtook me. For how could the dead speak; and was not the Nameless Ship but rusted iron at the bottom of the ocean?

Well, all listened to this strange signal, and one or two passed the remark that there was something

uncommon queer about it. As for the skipper, I saw him peering about as though his eyes had deceived him, and presently he said, "Would they have a siren aboard, do you think?" But I told him they had not, for I had seen the launch that morning and was quite sure there was no such thing aboard her. We were still debating it when the watch cried, "Fog on the starboard bow"; and, sure enough, the sea, which had been free even of a wraith of mist five minutes ago, was now covered by a black pall that might very well have been the smoke of a burning ship. Such a thing I had never heard of, nor any man on board.

"Is she afire?" the skipper asked. I rejoined that the strange launch stood a cable's length from the place, and that the smoke did not come from any funnel of hers. In truth, I do believe he knew as much himself when he put the question.

"I've been at sea thirty years, man and boy," he ran on, "and never did I see a thing like that. Why, she's running into it, gentlemen, slap into it, upon my word."

It was true enough. The launch ran straight for the mysterious bank of fog, and presently was lost to sight. We ourselves, holding upon a course two points to the south of theirs, now eased our engines, and presently went right about to avoid the fog-bank if we could; but hardly had we brought up the launch when the greatest wonder of the night befell. As in a twinkling the fog lifted, until hardly a hand's

breadth of cloud rested upon the sea. Where previously a look-out could not have seen a quarter of a mile ahead of him, he could now espy the Lizard Light if he had the eyes. But, stranger still, with the fog had gone the launch and its crew. Not a sign of them anywhere; no shape upon the clear and fretting waters; no witness to any derelict of the night; nothing but the rolling wave-caps and the far horizon and the distant lights of that shore we had left so expectantly.

I have related the circumstances, and I shall add little to that relation. It would be idle here to speak of the stupefaction which overtook our crew; of the senseless theories they propounded; either of that or their fears. Seamen are a superstitious folk, a d if ever a belief in the supernatural had a justification, it was upon that night when we stood off Falmouth Harbour and knew that the launch had escaped us. Even Captain York, the imperturbable, fell to a silence I could not misunderstand. My own thoughts, my faith, my wondering awe, I would not have disclosed to any man.

And yet I will bear witness in this place that some glimmer of the truth had come to me, and that the siren from the deep spoke, not of the living, but of the dead. Even as I had heard the voice of Captain Black over the wastes of Ice Haven, so did I hear it again, as it were, from the very sea wherein he had found a grave.

CHAPTER III

THE MAD DOCTOR IS HEARD OF AGAIN

We made a rapid passage to Greenland and first sighted the grim shores of that ice-bound land on the fifteenth day after leaving the Irish coast. Whatever had been the significance of the events at Dolphin's Cove, they were forgotten so soon as we steamed upon the open sea, and not a man of us did not dream of treasure the whole day long.

I used to laugh sometimes at the eagerness of our fellows and the wild talk with which they amused themselves. Verily you would have said that the riches of the fables were already poured into their laps. Even so shrewd a rogue as old Dan — Mary's favourite — could speak of the day when he would drive his "kerridge and pair" on Plymouth Hoe! The others dreamed idle dreams of trim houses by the seashore, and gardens fair with flowers, and a "blessed doing of nothing" — as Billy Eightbells tersely put it.

Of course, the men knew the object of our voyage by this time, and it had put heart into them. I think they cared little for stories of other adventures on the same track; nor did they believe that I, myself

who had sailed with Captain Black, would have gone at all if there were any doubts of the issue. "Mr. Mark, he knows summat," they would say. But just what I did know they had yet to find out.

We, ourselves, talked of it often in the cabin when Mary was not there; and we read and re-read the letter which the mad Doctor Osbart wrote me from Parkhurst Prison. I had received this extraordinary document some four months before we set sail from England, and immediately upon reading it I knew that Roderick and I would go to Greenland whatever the consequences.

Perhaps you will say that it was a madman's tale and that we were foolish to believe in it. But I thought it otherwise. Notwithstanding the high-flown language in which it was couched, its wild sentiment and grotesque exaggeration, I read in it the words of a man hungering for freedom; and sometimes I think that I could have pitied Osbart.

I shall set down this letter here that every one may know just what the Doctor wrote, and understand the purport of a voyage which has been so much misunderstood.

And, first, it was a letter which had been posted to me from the prison at Parkhurst, in the Isle of Wight, by what agency I do not know to this day. Dated oddly, "In the Year of the Adventure X," this alone should have stamped it as the effusion of a madman's brain. If I alone read truth between

the lines, remember that I alone of all on the *Celsis* had lived with Black upon his ship, had known and feared, and, in a way, had loved him.

THE PRISON, PARKHURST,
"*The Third Day of January,*
"*In the Year of the Adventure X.*

"MY DEAR STRONG: — Sincere good wishes to an old comrade of the adventurous days, the only one that I know to be living.

"Of all Black's crew, of all that gallant company, we, my dear fellow, remain to dance before Pilate if Pilate has a taste for our pirouetting.

"A bonny New Year to you, then, breathed out of this hell which chains me. Go free upon the decks of good ships and wet your Parthian locks at the fountains of the spindrift, as I would do but for the carrion which pick my bones in this house of skeletons.

"What forbids? Do you not read, and has the 'ice blink near and white' no meaning for you? Man, I would credit you with less than the soul of a dog if Black has not beckoned you northward and the great dead ghosts do not call you.

"What forbids? I repeat. Iron doors against which your hands may beat until they are fleshless? Men of the devils' eyes who hold you down until the blood surges in your brain and the walls turn black before you? Nothing of the kind. Then, fear of the Yanks who go to seek Black's treasure — our treasure — is it that, Mark Strong? Shame upon you

that you let me write the words. I would sooner be a hundred fathoms down, branded and blind, at the heart of the blackest rock of Satan than men should write as much of me.

"Here am I 'fettered bar to wrist all for red iniquity,' as helpess as any lamb at the butcher's block, and but one man living of all Black's crew to whom I may turn.

"Is he comrade or craven? Will he leave me here in the marrow of hell or fetch me out to see the wide heaven and the great white world of silence? He can do it, for by money it can be done.

"The treasure lies in the chamber of the dead. Go where dead men's fingers point and their gibes ring in your ears. Turn the crescent of the tomb and delve amid its winding sheets. Then shall Cortina comb the hair of Fair-star and the jewels fall into her lap.

"Black estimated it at three millions sterling. He was little given to overtalk, as you know well. There's enough there, anyway, to set you and me aboard the great Golden Bug and carry us down to the cities of the fountain. Go, then — not to-morrow, but to-day, and return to fetch me, as Black would have done. In his name, go — cannot you hear him crying from the sea and calling you?

"You will go, Strong, and the gates of this living hell will open before me, and I shall stand a free man upon the deck of a good ship, and the night

will be no longer a vision of dreams, but of the wide waters which the Master ruled, and we will rule in his name."

I say that we read this letter again and again, always discerning some new meaning and seldom forgetting to remind ourselves that a madman wrote it. Somewhat to my surprise, our skipper heard it less patiently than Roderick, and would often tell me that I would have been wiser to show it to him before we sailed and not afterward as I had done. Chiefly, I think, he was concerned about the American story and Osbart's belief that another expedition would arrive in Greenland before us. Rumour had spoken of this even in England, and surely it was a little wonderful that Osbart had heard of it in the seclusion of his prison.

"It's just this, gentlemen," the Captain would say, "there's been a syndicate put together in New York to hunt down this treasure, and your mad friend has got wind of it. Maybe they tried to buy him and would not pay the price, or he may have known too much about them to listen. Anyway, the fact is that we may find others there before us, and, if we do, look out for squalls."

Roderick replied that squalls were what he would have expected in that latitude; but I tackled the Captain boldly with knowing more than he would tell, and presently he admitted it.

"Has this been a straightforward voyage from the beginning?" he asked me in turn. "Could any fair man make it out to be that? I'll say nothing about the three fellows at Falmouth, and the trick they played upon us — but what of the crew themselves and their bogeys? Did they learn what they know from us or from others? And, if from others, then what others? Doesn't it all say that there have been stories about, even at Dolphin's Cove, and that they have listened to them? If not, to what then, I ask you?"

"You mean to say," said I, "that the men know something of Jo Mitchell's expedition?"

"Of course they do. Jo has been in five treasure hunts in as many years. He was after the Spanish galleon stuff on the West Coast of Ireland not nine months ago; he went to the South Atlantic with the Chilian millionaires who thought to find pieces of eight not a hundred miles from the Magellan Straits; and here he is after Black's lot now. Well, he won't be a nice partner at the game of Bo-Peep. There'll be heads broken if Jo Mitchell's before us. I suppose you have thought about that, gentlemen; you were prepared for it when you set out?"

Roderick answered that the skipper's prophecy savoured too much of an Irish wake to be taken seriously; and, in truth, I could see that he thought very little of this Jo Mitchell or of his chances.

"Half-a-dozen Government ships have looked for this stuff and failed to find it," he said in his own drawling way; "we know where it is, or we think we do, and that's not a bad beginning. First catch your hare, Captain, and see that you get him by the tail."

"Roderick means," said I in my turn, "that if it comes to a fight, we ought not to do so very badly, Captain. After all, we have sixteen rifles on board, and some of us can use them. I don't suppose this wonderful Jo Mitchell is going to sail an iron-clad; and, if he were, I would back Captain York against him every time. Now, wouldn't you, Roderick?"

Of course, Roderick agreed to it, and, of course the Captain was very well pleased. Even these silent men are not averse to flattery, and our skipperhwas not proof against an ancient method of attack. When next he took up the thread of his argument, he seemed to have forgotten that he had ever expressed any apprehensions at all.

"Hurry is our motto, and plenty of it," he exclaimed with emphasis. "This crew has a bee in its bonnet, and it will remain there until we lose sight of the shores of Greenland and are heading home again. We musn't let them think about it. If Jo Mitchell is there when we sail in — why, then we'll trick him at a game of wits, if we can; and, if not, we'll fight him. Flesh and blood will not frighten

our fellows; it's the other stories that shake them, and shake them badly."

"You mean this silly stuff about the hunchback being on board?"

"I mean nothing less, sir," said the Captain quietly. "The crew believes that we shipped the one-eyed man at Dolphin's Cove, and that he's aboard us now. Even my own mates are full of it. More than one of them swears he has seen the fellow in the middle-watch, and who's to argue with that? I tell you that if we go down, it will be the shadow of a man that sinks us. You can't fight superstition, sir; you are fighting the air."

I agreed that you could not; but I put it to him that the crew were quite honest in their belief, and that, at any rate, he could trust them to the last man. Judge of my astonishment when he hesitated to reply.

"Then you have your doubts!" I exclaimed. He could not deny it.

"There is one man, and one only, who does not please me," he said at length. "Perhaps you know his name."

"You mean Bill Fairway, Captain?"

"I mean no other, Mr. Mark. That man is a rogue, or I never saw one. Remember it, should the occasion arise; perhaps it will come sooner than you think for. Unless I am mistaken, our voyage is over. Let us go and see if I am right."

He opened the cabin door, and in a moment we

understood. Such an excited crew, such wild faces of eager men, I have never seen in all my life. Every man Jack of our fellows was at the taffrail, I do believe, and as for little Mary, she was skipping about like a fairy. Our voyage, indeed, was done, and yonder lay the shores of Greenland.

CHAPTER IV

WE ARRIVE AT ICE HAVEN

Now, it was at seven bells in the second dog-watch that we espied the headlands of Captain Black's haven, and about an hour later when the wonderful shore became fully visible. Such a scene of solitude and grandeur a poet might not imagine; nor could I wonder that the spell of it put other thoughts from our minds and compelled us to pay silent homage to its majesty.

And here I would remind you that I had last looked upon this scene from the deck of the Nameless Ship, at an hour when the dead pirate set out to brave Europe and to sail to his destruction. All my thoughts had been of home and country then; a passionate desire to escape the bondage and to flee that dreadful company had possessed me. Now, for the first time, the grandeur of the home which Black had chosen became apparent to me, and I could tell with pride what hitherto I had named but with fear.

Imagine a wall of glittering schists; a vast cliff, limned, as it were, in jasper and chrysoprase and chalcedony; say that this jewelled rampart lifted a

resolute face to the gentle waves of an Arctic sea; let the walls fall back by here and there to the curves of soft bays, all aglitter with rivers of solid ice, whence the bergs float down to the Atlantic. Do this, and set the towering caps of snowy mountains above them all, and you have the shores of Greenland as the crew of the *Celsis* first espied them, and as I who write looked upon them for the second time.

I shall not try to tell you of all that passed between us on the quarter-deck while we stood to watch this entrancing scene, and to speculate upon our good fortune in making the haven without fault.

A hundred questions were put to me and answered as readily. I told them how the giant headlands which guarded the entrance to the inner waters were more than a thousand feet high. I spoke of a monstrous chasm lying between an outer fiord and the great lake beyond. I promised them that they should visit Black's home with me and sleep in a house that surely had been one of the wonders of the world. And then, escaping from them for the ship's sake, I took Captain York apart and spoke to him of the anchorage and of what I knew of it.

"You have the Government chart," said I, "and will know more than I, Captain; but one thing is certain — we shall drop no anchor in the fiord, for it is more than a mile deep. Black used to warp the Nameless Ship against the northward cliff, and we ought to be able to pick his moorings up. If we

don't, you may care to try the narrow passage, and make the lake beyond; but it's dangerous work, and we would lie more snugly in the outer basin if by any chance we find ourselves in company."

The Captain looked up under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Meaning if Jo Mitchell should be in?"

"Or any other Joe, Captain," said I, with a laugh.

He nodded his head.

"This is the end of the world, or looks something like it," he ran on. "But there'll be no Americans ashore, I'm thinking; and Jo Mitchell's not the man to be caught asleep. My glass has shown me a barren shore for the last half-hour or more. And that's to say we're lucky men, Mr. Mark, very lucky men indeed."

I could see that he was not a little excited at the thought, and that was natural enough. We had set out upon this voyage almost in a holiday spirit. Perhaps we had not really believed in the existence of any treasure at all — and now here we were, the masters of Ice Haven after all, free to search every nook and cranny of it, and to delude ourselves with those dreams which had sent us out of England. Do you wonder that my heart beat fast as I returned to the deck, and stood with Roderick and Mary to see the ship go in, and to know that the end was at hand?

We steamed very slowly at this time, passing the

northernmost headland of the fiord so closely that a man could have tossed a biscuit to its shining crags. Everywhere a great glow of the sunlight searched out the wonders of the place and fell with blinding splendour upon the untrodden snow. We had now entered the great fiord, and the rocky walls rose up sheer on either hand. Not a sound save of the whirring wings of monstrous birds disturbed the stillness and solitude which knew man for the first time. The crew stood awed by its unknown mysteries. Even little Mary drew nearer to me and shuddered.

"You came here with Captain Black, did you not?" she asked me.

I said that it was so.

"But precious little I saw of the place then, Mary, for they had me a prisoner in the cabin, and no one but the mad Doctor came near me. Just think of it: of all that wild crew, he is the only one alive. Should not this be a place of spirits?"

She did not answer me, leaving it to old Dan, her favourite of the crew, who happened to overhear us. Dan had no respect for ghosts, and treated them but ill.

"Askin' your pardon, sir," says he, "I've lived forty years man and boy, and I never heerd yet of no speerit worth his victuals. They're overrated parties, be sure of it, sir. Why, my old skipper he had a ghostee in his wine cellar, and never a mouthful of good liquor did he miss as long as I knew him.

What sort of a speerit was that, I arst you, to pass by good rum and not taste the flavour of it? No, says I, speerits is like Rotherhithe chickens, mostly bones; and bones never did no good to nobody that I've heerd tell on."

"You prefer good roast beef, Dan," said I. And that was evident enough, for a finer specimen of a well-fed sailor does not exist aboard any ship. When he had replied that he would not refuse "the same" if it were offered to him, there came a loud word of command from the bridge, and I saw that our skipper had discovered the berth where the Nameless Ship used to lie, and was warping the yacht at the pirates' very anchorage. This was a little slap on the back for my pride; and when we had made fast, and the engines were stopped, and the Captain himself come down from the bridge, there was not a man aboard who did not act and talk as though the treasure were already shipped and the anchor weighed for home. Had we not raced the "derned Yankees" to Ice Haven and beaten them after all? Oh, it was a splendid moment, and one I shall never forget.

This would have been about two bells in the first watch, and I remember that we had champagne at dinner that night, and drank the toast "Success." Half an hour later Roderick and I were afloat in the dinghy, rowing headlong for the "narrows," and determined to have one peep at Black's old home whatever the consequences.

It was a glorious night, the moon at the full, and a glow of the lingering sun shimmering upon the mountains. Cold as it was, we felt it not at all in the still air; while as for the sea, it might have been a sheet of silver where the moonbeams fell.

Over these placid waters we rowed toward the narrows, and as we went we could see the lights of the *Celsis* shining like so many stars against the background of the rock. Then we lost them suddenly at a turn of the cliff, and, pulling our dinghy round a bluff, we found ourselves in a great chasm where the towering peaks seemed to close above our very heads and hardly a patch of the azure sky was visible. This was a dreadful ravine of the sea, and old Dan might well have recanted had he come with us. But I had told Roderick all about it, and he had honesty enough to admit its grandeur.

"What a devil of a place, Mark. Is this the chasm you spoke of?"

I told him that it was.

"The walls," said I, "run to a height of fifteen hundred feet. There is the most wonderful echo to be had here for a gunshot. Osbart, the mad Doctor, used to come here every day and shoot at the air with his revolver. If I had a pistol I would put it to the proof, but as I haven't ——"

"Oh," says he, cutting in quickly, "that's all right, old chap," and before I could utter another word he had whipped out a revolver and fired it at

the stars. What followed would have put any decent thunderstorm to shame. I swear that old Heinrich Hudson, playing Rip van Winkle in the Kaatskills, knocked down his ninepins to no such sounds. The very hills might have been at war, giants at their games, as the echoes swelled from peak to peak and then died away in fearful mutterings.

I did not fail to observe that Master Roderick put his pistol away quickly enough while the thunder was still rolling, and that both of us sat a little while in silence, awed by what we had heard. The stillness which succeeded the booming echoes seemed almost unnatural, and it was impossible to avoid the reflection that we had done a foolish thing. Of course, we were quite alone there; and all our fears of other expeditions had been satisfied by discovering the empty haven. Nevertheless, I was sorry that I had spoken at all, and did not hesitate to say so.

"That would have been a pretty 'Good day' to the Yankees, Roderick, if they had beaten us in the race. I wonder what Jo Mitchell would have said if he had heard it?"

"He would have said a lot, and some of it would have been unfit for print. Why speculate? This is hardly the place, is it?"

"Oh," said I, "one place is as good as another for a man who has played the fool. Don't you see that we may have alarmed them on the ship. If Mary were not on board ——"

He laughed.

"Well, do you think she'll have the vapours? Leave Mary out of it, if you please, my boy. What you're thinking of is neither my sister nor the ship. You are trying to tell yourself that there might be somebody on the hills after all. Now, isn't it so?"

I would not answer him, afraid to speak of foolish fancies and yet unable to deny them. The idea that we were not alone in that wild place had forced itself upon my mind directly the ship had been lost to our view; and it recurred now when I took up the oars and began to pull the dinghy through the chasm. But, naturally, I said nothing to Roderick about it, and I believed that it would trouble me no more so soon as we came out upon the lake.

The great chasm, you should know, is nearly a quarter of a mile long, and the seaway twists and turns like the canals in Venice. It is so narrow in places that a horse might leap across, if he could find foothold; but his rider would have to search afar, for the walls of it are often sheer and sometimes they overhang like the eaves of a mediæval city. The upper end of it, where it opens into a lake, is a natural gateway, pillared by great bluffs, and certainly not thirty feet across. We used to go to and fro in a launch from Black's ship, and I remember that the cargo steamers, which brought the pirate's stores from America and Europe, made the passage easily, so that there must have been plenty of water there.

What was my astonishment, then, to hear Roderick cry "easy" as we approached this gateway, and to find it barred right across with a formidable boom no ship could have passed.

"Hulloa," cried I; "and what now, Roddy?"

"Why," says he, quite calmly, "it would appear to be a tree."

"That's very odd," said I. "It must have been done by the commander of the *Invincible* when he was here last autumn. Is there no way round, Roddy?"

We peered together at the obstacle and could espy no break in the barrier whatever. Huge baulks of timber had been piled one upon the other and bound together by a great iron chain which a gunshot hardly would have blasted. Carried to a height of five feet above the water, it was impossible to see over the boom; while upon our side the great height of the cliffs and the narrowness of the channel left us almost in black darkness.

"Well," said I, at last, "we shan't sup in Black's house to-night, and that's sure and certain, Roddy. Hold on with the boat-hook while I take a peep. We came here to climb, you know, and may as well begin now. Steady, old man, the dinghy isn't a billiard table, remember. That's better; and now hold tight."

I got a foothold on one of the baulks as I spoke, and, pulling myself up by the chain, I stood at length on the summit of the boom, and looked out over the

lake which had been the object of our journey. Not for one instant did the whole meaning of what I saw occur to me. The beauty of the scene, the wondrous light of mingled moon and sun, the wide expanse of the unruffled water, the shimmer of the distant snow-fields, these held my eyes spellbound. What fearful hours I had known by that lake-side when the dead pirate ruled it! There, yonder, he had buried a man alive in the snow. Southward I could point to the caverns where the dead slept and the treasure lay. Northward were the habitations of Black's men; the houses on the beach; the caves in the hill-side; the Master's house. One by one I noted the familiar landmarks and dwelt upon them. The truth, the meaning of what I saw, came but slowly. Perhaps I feared to tell it even to Roderick, lest I should be mistaken. And I sat and watched, as a man may watch an enemy's camp at the dead of night.

A lantern swung upon the hill-side. It danced from ledge to ledge of the rock as a giant fire-fly hovering. I saw it pass from the beach, up the iron ladder, to the door by which I, myself, had entered in when first I met the great Captain. There for an instant the light was enveloped by a brighter aureole, showing me the figures of men upon the platform, and of others in the doorway behind them. As swiftly the vision passed, twilight fell. The waters ebbed silently at the foot of the boom; the sun still glinted upon the sparkling snow of the greater heights. I

realized that Roderick was hailing me from the dinghy below.

"Well, old Rameses, and what now?"

"Hush!" cried I, leaping down to him headlong. "The Yankees are here, and we are beaten, Roddy!"

He did not say a word. We pushed the dinghy off and rowed back to the ship as though an alarm had been sounded and the pursuit begun.

CHAPTER V

THE MURDER ON THE SHIP

THEY were working the great searchlight on the bridge deck of the *Celsis* when we rounded the bluff, and its clear white arc fell magnificently upon the unruffled waters. Here I ceased to row; and, remembering with some sense that the same barrier which forbade our passage would forbid the passage to others, I lay upon my oars and watched the lantern's path. Perhaps I thought that the hills might have their tale to tell. Fear of pursuit had given place to sense of security. There lay our own good ship, a ready haven, and one whose deck a man might tread proudly. The heights about the fiord, the high rocks and the low, revealed but their nakedness when the white light searched them. Whoever had come to Ice Haven had made the lake-side his home; and that was wisdom, for by the lake the treasure lay.

"Roddy," I said, breathing as a man who has run a race, "this will be bad news for the men, Roddy ——"

He shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigarette, just to show me how little he thought of it.

"It would have been worse news for us if we hadn't got back."

"Was there ever any doubt of our getting back?"

"I'll tell you now," he said, and very solemnly; "it's God's truth that I saw a man within a biscuit-toss of you as you leaped down from the boom. He had a gun in his hand, and I think it very wonderful that he did not fire it."

"Are you sure of it, Roddy?"

"As sure as this match shows me your white face, Mark. I dared not speak a word, and I'm glad I didn't. But I shan't be sorry to go on board again, and that's the truth. The black place gave me the creeps; I can't deny it."

I made no reply, just dipping my oars quietly and rowing the dinghy back to the ship. Captain York was at the gangway when we went up, and Mary, her head muffled in a white shawl, stood by his side. Again I reflected upon the folly which had brought her to Ice Haven. Had we not promised her that she should go ski-ing to-morrow?

"What!" cried I, "not in bed yet, Mary? don't you know it is nearly eleven o'clock?"

"Oh," says she, "and what an autocrat is this! Am I not 'out,' Mark? Would you 'finish' me again?" And then she asked me:

"Whatever have you been doing to get into that state, sir? Why, you're wet through, and — look,

your hand is bleeding. Have you been fighting Roddy? I'm ashamed of you both. And please to come to my cabin to be bandaged — immediately, sir; I command it."

I suppose I had cut my hand as I climbed down from the boom; but I would not say a word about it, and as Mary loves nothing so much as bandaging somebody, I let her have her way. When it was done, she consented to admit that even a young lady who was "out" might properly turn in some time, and I left her and went up to the smoking-room, where I knew the others would be waiting for me.

This is a commodious cabin, right forward of the bridge, with large glass windows all round, and a couple of doors opening on the upper deck. I noticed as I went that the searchlight still played upon the hills, and the first question I put to the skipper had to do with the fact.

"So the watch doesn't like the sun, Captain?"

He made no answer, inviting me to a chair by his side, and pouring out a long glass of cool drink which I needed badly enough. When it was empty, and our pipes alight, he signified almost with a look that he had the news.

"Our friends from over yonder have lost no time," he said, puffing at his black pipe between every stroke. "I thought as much an hour ago. Your news was no surprise to me, Mr. Mark."

"Then the lantern showed you something, Captain ——"

"It showed me two men on yonder bluff as plain as ever I saw a man in my life. I fired a rocket to recall you, but you did not see it. We should have put out a boat but for your pistol-shot. I thought it safer to stand by when I heard that. Jo Mitchell won't be in any hurry to begin, that's certain."

We agreed to it. After all, a treasure hunt is a thing of which all the world hears in our day, and it was not likely that the man would open the campaign by any act of violence for which he might be accused and tried afterward. The danger would come when we set to work.

"He's a man in possession," the skipper went on, "and that's nine points of the law any day. If we force our way in, he'll show fight, and for that we must be ready. I'll not deny that I think this ship and those on board it in some danger, and you may be very sure I shall do what I believe to be my duty. Beyond that I do not go. I have a responsibility to the hands, and it must not be forgotten. My men sail the ship — they fight when they are hurt, not before."

"In which case," said Roderick, "we may as well weigh anchor and sail for Falmouth to-morrow. You don't suppose Jo Mitchell is going to ask us to dinner, Captain?"

"I suppose nothing at all, sir. If there is a way,

and you can point it out to me, I take it. My duty is to protect the ship and those on board her. I'll do it to the beast of my ability."

It was an honest speech and we could not quarrel with it. Reason said that we should have considered all this before we sailed; but there had been little prudence shown in the matter, and the timorous hopes and fears had been but ill expressed. Now, we knew the truth — the Americans were the masters of Ice Haven, and the gates of it had been shut upon us.

"Well," said I, at length, "there may be a way, Captain, and, if there be, I'll trust to my wits to find it. You answer for the ship, and I'll answer for the shore. If there is a treasure left by Black, we have a better chance of finding it than any other. Osbart is a madman, but there may be a method in his madness. I believe he liked me, and that stands for something. At any rate, we can but put him to the proof, and we'll lose no time in doing it. To-morrow night I am going through to Dead Man's Cave. If I know anything of Roddy, he'll come with me. And I think, Captain, that two may be more than enough for the work we have to do."

"It may be two too many, sir," said the Captain dryly. But I could see I had impressed him. As for Roderick, he was as wide awake as ever I saw him in my life.

"Of course, old Scribe's right," he cried, striking

half-a-dozen matches in his excitement. "Let's know if there is anything worth fighting for before we sharpen our hatchets. No treasure — no guns. We came on a picnic — there's no denying that; and if it's no more than a picnic, we shall have seen Ice Haven, anyway. Mitchell won't fight unless the dollars are on the table. Let us find them, and then come to terms with him, if we can. Now, what do you say to that, Captain?"

Well, the Captain said nothing at all, for what should happen in the thick of it but that we heard a great shouting and stamping on deck: and presently in comes Billy Eightbells, with half-a-dozen shaking men upon his heels, and the babel they set up would have done credit to a monkey-house. When Billy found his tongue to tell us what happened, we laughed aloud at him. The hunchback of Dolphin's Cove had shown his face in the fo'castle, said he. and the men swore it with great fists smiting from pretty black hands.

"Dan, he were awake, and he seed him first — he ain't no man for speerits. Then Martin, the fireman, cried out that the devil was athwart his hawse — and Martin's no female in a sou'-wester. There was eight of we, and weight that swears to his blue mug. He's aboard this ship, Captain, sure and certain, and if you turn up the hands, you'll take him. We says it — all on us. There ain't a man as don't sign to it — you may lay to that, Captain. Jack-o'-Lantern's

aboard us, and there'll be some that will know it if he ain't put over this night."

They spoke all together; this man contradicting that, and a third swearing that what the others had said was false. We laughed at Billy Eightbells when he began to tell us the amazing tale; but such earnestness as we witnessed was irresistible, and no sooner had the whole story been blabbed than the Captain strode out to the deck and called for our first officer, that quiet Scotsman, Mr. Farquharson. He was already in his bunk, but he came out presently in a long overall and listened to the news wide-eyed.

"You hear, Mr. Farquharson," cried the skipper, "the men say we have a stowaway, the hunchback that came over from Falmouth."

"I'm thinking it more likely that he would have come out of a keg of rum, sir."

Even grim Captain York smiled.

"Ah," says he, "that kind of spirit does not see with a single eye, Mr. Farquharson. But I'll trouble you to go round the ship with me, all the same. The man that trips up upon a ghost is a poor bedfellow — there are about eight of them down below. Let us try to get them to sleep, sir, before they give the spirit a tail."

He called for lanterns, and a search party fell in. Billy Eightbells was sent up to the bridge that he might have a view of the whole ship. There was a

sentinel posted astern, and another ordered to the maintop of the short foremast. The rest, armed with lanterns, went down to the depths, searched the fo'castle from end to end, dived into the coal-bunkers, went to the very profundity of the ship and tracked the iron tunnel in which the screw-shaft runs. Our steward, the nimble old fellow they call Pharaoh, because he is given to stories of the Red Sea, then opened the doors of the cabins we were not using and helped us to lay them bare. We had all the lights on in the saloons, the galleys, and even in the bath rooms, but went as near to finding a ghost as a bag full of diamonds.

In a way the search was both a ridiculous and a picturesque thing enough. If a satirist had laughed at the anxious faces thrust forward into this or that nook or cranny, an artist would have seen the same faces aglow with the lanterns' light and eloquent of many emotions. And just as action is the surest antidote to fear, so was our search the best answer we could make to Billy Eightbells and the faint-hearts. They were willing to admit, when it was done, that what they had seen might not have been seen after all; and they turned in at length, encouraging each other with smooth words, but taking mighty good care that no man went alone. When they were gone, the skipper hinted that we should do well to imitate them. It was just one o'clock of the morning and two bells sounded as I shut my cabin door. But

I think I was just as far from sleep as ever I had been in all my life.

Consider how it went with me. The last time I had sailed into this haven I had been a close prisoner on Black's ship. The only friend I had known then was Osbart, the mad Doctor. When they took me ashore I saw fearful things done: men fighting naked with knives, men shot down and buried in the snow — drink, debauchery, horror of all kinds. Now, for the second time, I visited Ice Haven to see if it were true that Black's treasure lay hidden here, and was a fact and not a fable. Setting out upon what had promised to be but a pleasure cruise, inviting Roderick and Mary to accompany me, I found myself instantly at the heart of a dangerous adventure; threatened I knew not by what perils; haunted by fears and dreams I would have confessed to no man. And from these perils my wit must save me, as it had saved me on board the Nameless Ship, and even on the lonely Atlantic where the great Captain had met his death.

This latter thought ran in my head to the exclusion of others. I must save my friends, must justify my beliefs, must outwit these Americans who had beaten us in the race. Upon it at last I think that I fell into a light sleep; but it was a sleep troubled by dreams, and chiefly a dream of the hunchback for whom we had searched so vainly. Unlike the men, I did not fear this apparition at all, even when

it seemed (in my sleep) that he opened the port above me and crept softly upon my bed.

Now spoke the logic of the dream, and said that if the man had hidden from us at all, he had hidden in the main chains, leaping overboard when a hue and cry was raised, and laughing, I doubt not, while we searched the ship. I said that it must be so, and, starting up in a sweat, I saw that my cabin was empty. Now a new dread fell upon me, but not a dread of the hunchback.

How to tell you of this I hardly know. The cabin was as it had been when I dropped to a fitful sleep; and yet I felt that it was not the same. Once I thought I heard a sound of heavy breathing at my door; but when I switched on the electric light, I saw that the door was fast shut and bolted. Through the porthole when I had drawn the curtain I could discern the rocky shores of the fiord, the rivers of ice and the lofty pinnacles. It was night and yet day, for the sun does not set in the Arctic circle when the month is May. The warm, wan light did but little to cheer me, and I lay back upon my pillow and fell to sleep in earnest.

Now comes the more wonderful thing. From my sleep was I waked a second time to find the warm sunlight flooding my room, and yet my body as cold as though it were swathed in ice. Opening my eyes as one waked from a dream, I saw the hunchback of Dolphin's Cave as plainly as ever I saw anything in

all my life. There he stood crouching over the bed, a wild, uncouth figure of a man who would jibber a story if he could, but had not the power of speech to tell it. On my side was the stupor of lingering sleep, blank disbelief in what I saw and the disposition to name it a nightmare. If I came to do otherwise, it was the quickness of the man himself which recalled me to sense. A sound of stirring on the deck, the footfall of the watch, and the fellow had gone in a flash, slipping like an eel through the open port and so being hidden instantly from sight.

Well, I was staggered, to be sure, and utterly confounded. I saw that I had not feared the man, and that was the truth; but curiosity remained, and kneeling upon my bed (for we have beds in the private cabins of the *Celsis*) I went to peer through the port after him — but this was the moment when I saw another man on the floor and understood in a flash what had happened. There had been two in my cabin and one lay dead, so close to me that I could have touched him with my hand. When I looked at him again, I saw that he had been stabbed through the heart; and all the horror of his waxen face and hanging jaw and staring eyes getting the better of me, I ran wildly from the place, and never ceased to run until the door of the Captain's cabin was shut behind me and every word of the story told.

"It would be Bill Fairway," says he, drawing on

his clothes as he could. I told him that Fairway was the man.

"Then," says he, "but for God's Providence, you'd have been a dead man this night. And it was the hunchback, you say? Surely, sir, we are in the presence of some great mystery."

I said that it must be so, though of its nature or meaning I could tell him nothing. The vain thoughts, which had afflicted me when we pursued and lost the strange craft off Falmouth light, here came anew to set my head in a whirl and my heart beating.

The dead had spoken to me by the deed of the living. The Master who had ruled this haven of the desolate land, had sent his messenger to my bed side. Name it superstition, folly, if you will, accuse me as you may, that was my belief.

And I clung to it tenaciously as I followed the Captain to the deck and beheld the morning sun shining gloriously upon Ice Haven.

CHAPTER VI

WE MEET JO MITCHELL

I SHALL not try to tell you of the stir made upon the ship by this truly terrible affair.

Hitherto, we had treated this adventure lightly enough; but we would treat it lightly no longer. The reality of death stood between us and the jest. We knew now what the lust of gold might mean. The black secrets of this haunted haven had revealed themselves beyond all question of doubt. It remained to do what we could both to quieten the men and to keep the dread affair as close as might be. And to this we set ourselves with all the strength of purpose we could command.

Herein both the time and the circumstance helped us. Of the two upon deck, one was old Dan, whom nothing would shake; the other a stolid Norwegian, who was made to understand that something beyond the ordinary had happened, and that there would be money if he held his tongue upon it. By the aid of these and of Mr. Farquharson, our chief officer, we got the dead man from my cabin and lowered him to the long-boat. There was a slope of the snows upon the far side of the fiord where a landing might be

effected; and thither we rowed our ghastly burden and cut for it a grave of the snows. Judging no man, as Mr. Farquharson bade us, we waited while he uttered one prayer aloud to his Maker for the dead who could answer to no charge; and then we returned as we had come to the ship.

The men would know, we said, but knowledge would be easier for them and for us now that this was done. I had gone down with Captain York to his cabin directly we returned aboard, and thither Roderick followed us without delay. The new nature of our responsibilities toward the good fellows who had sailed with us put a gloom upon us all and a bit upon our tongues. I think we were afraid to tell each other exactly what we thought; afraid to say that what one had attempted, another might accomplish. The declaration of war *à outrance*, this message of the night, spoke no longer of a hunt for the dead man's gold; but of strife and of the mystery of strife which abject surrender alone could evade.

"It comes to this, gentlemen," said the Captain very solemnly, "either we weigh anchor and leave it to them: or we stand with rifles in our hands the sun round. That this man came aboard the ship to do us or it a mischief, I would doubt no more than I doubt my own existence. Who sent him is another affair. I have my own notions about that, and when I set foot in England I'll tell you what they are. Meanwhile, the yacht is yours and it is for you to say 'Aye'

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or 'No.' Will you leave the other party in possession, and go as you came; or will you stand by the colours at any cost? It's for you to decide, gentlemen, and for me to obey."

Of course, he knew what answer we would make. It was so like dear old Captain York to be preaching of duty toward his crew in one breath, and fire and fury for the Yankees the next. Had we commanded him to weigh anchor and sail, I don't believe he would have obeyed us. The grit of combat was in his very bones. He would have fought a gun-boat if we had put it to him.

"If it's with us, Captain," said I, "you have our answer without waiting. This ship is here, and here she stays. There's no man living who has a better right to hunt for Black's treasure than myself, and that's a right I don't surrender while there's one stick of the old yacht left. You may take that for the decision you speak of — we'd waste time to argle-bargle at such a moment."

The Captain was very pleased.

"For yourself and Mr. Stewart?" asks he, looking from one to the other a little curiously.

"For myself and Mr. Stewart," said I, with hardly a glance at Roderick. What need to ask that born lover of a rough-and-tumble whether he would haul down his flag to the adventurers? As well ask him to deny that Scotsmen are the salt of the earth (as he tells us every day that they are).

So we were agreed finely upon it, you will see, and in the very thick of a parley, when down came Mr. Farquharson to say that a boat was hailing the ship, and that he believed Jo Mitchell was aboard her. This put us in a bit of a fluster, and we had a talk as to whether we should receive them or no; but in the end we decided to hear the man for himself. Going out to the deck together, we found a little company of strangers at the head of the gangway, and foremost among them an exceedingly pleasant and good-looking young American who introduced himself to us as their leader. Such a smooth-tongued fellow I have not met for a long time. It really would have appeared that he had come aboard our ship with no other idea than to confer an obligation upon us.

"Captain York," says he, holding out his hand to the skipper, "it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Mr. Strong, I should have known you anywhere from the pictures. This would be Mr. Stewart, I suppose. I'm glad to meet you all, gentlemen, and to say a few words to you, if you please."

He seemed to expect that we should show him into the cabin immediately; and, in truth, we had no option in the matter. The rest of his fellows, one of whom had the most villainous countenance I have ever seen on a man, began to talk to Mr. Farquharson and to Billy Eightbells, in their turn, and to show a curiosity concerning the ship which was a little

disquieting. With Jo Mitchell himself, however, you could find no fault whatever. His manners were those of a charming gentleman — he was the very soul of affability.

"No," says he to the Captain, refusing our offers of morning coffee or other hospitality; "my breakfast's waiting on the yacht, and I won't make two bites of it. What I came to say is this, gentlemen. Your expedition has got fine whiskers on it. As fair-dealing men, I don't imagine you are going to dispute the ground with me. This has been a race, and the best, or the luckiest, has won. Well, I'm sorry for your bad luck, but I can't mend it. The treasure is now aboard of my ship, and the day she's coaled I sail for New York. Let's end it there and strike a bargain upon it. I'll pay you ten per cent. into any bank, English or American, you care to name on the day I make New York harbour. That's a fair offer, and few would make it. Let me hear that you are wise, and take it while I'm in the mood."

He looked from one to the other, as though searching for thoughts in our faces; and as he looked I thought that I began to know the man better. Greed, malice, the dark side of murder, were all stamped on that changing countenance. I knew that he lied — that his tale was a rigmarole of invention and subterfuge which a child might not have believed. Even so, our skipper's rejoinder amazed me.

"Captain Mitchell," says he, calmly enough, "you

haven't found the treasure, or you wouldn't be aboard this ship."

Well, the fellow stared as though a blow had been struck. He looked at the Captain and looked at us, while his face was a picture to see.

"What," he cried, "you begin by calling me a liar!"

"I do," says the skipper, "though I would not have put it that way myself. You haven't found the treasure, and you don't know where it is. That's why you came to us ——"

"So help me ——"

"No, no — we don't want your oaths, if you please. Keep those for your own company, Captain Mitchell. What's more, I'll tell you this — talk of your ten per cent. when your eggs are hatched. It's a long way from this cove to the American banks you speak of. I don't think we will be undertaking the voyage at present."

"I said any bank — American or English."

"Ah," says the skipper, "a cosmopolitan, it would appear," and there was so much irony in his tone that Roderick and I laughed outright. The look Mitchell shot at us upon that should have fired tinder had there been any lying thereabouts. But there wasn't, and we didn't mind it overmuch.

"Oh," says he, rising as he spoke and ramming on his cap as though to affront us, "I'm not here to barter like a down-town Jew. If you won't have the

fair, you shall take the foul. This lay is mine, and the man who disputes it with me must look out for himself. I give you fair warning. Share with me, and I'll show my generosity; but try to queer my pitch, and I'll blow your ship to hell as sure as the sun is rising. That's my last word, so help me God. You may take it or leave it, gentlemen."

He asked for no answer, but bounced out of the cabin and went straight to the boat that waited for him. We, however, continued to sit about the table, and for many minutes we did not utter a word. When Roderick spoke at last, it was good to hear the sound of a voice.

"That's a man who knows what he wants," said he. The skipper took it up.

"We should join him there," he said, with a comical look somewhat foreign to him. "I want one thing very much at this moment, Mr. Stewart."

"And what's that, Captain?"

"The permission to take such steps as I please for the safety of this ship — the command ashore as well as afloat for the time being."

"Oh," said I, "that's fair enough. What do you propose, Captain?"

"To change the anchorage, if I think fit. Next, to discover what Mitchell himself is doing. There I count upon you, Mr. Strong. But you shouldn't go until sunset, which is a manner of speaking in

this pretty country. Let me say that you don't go until it can be done with discretion."

"I understand. We shall be watched."

"And must find an opportunity of watching. I'll think it out during the morning. Meanwhile, there's breakfast. That wouldn't be a bad beginning, gentlemen."

He rose as he spoke, and we followed him very willingly. The whole ship was awake by this time, and little Mary herself — the "trimmest craft afloat," as old Dan remarked — waiting for us at the table. We sat down as though it were a common day, though we knew well enough that the glove had been cast down and that the momentous hour was at hand.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT STONE ROLLS BACK

THERE had been a promise made to Mary that she should go ashore with her skis as soon as might be, and, much to my surprise, I heard the Captain say that she could go when breakfast was done, if she had the mind. Naturally, she accepted in a girlish outburst which put down all argument, and five bells in the forenoon watch had not been struck when we were in the launch and Mr. Farquharson at the tiller.

I thought it a little strange that the first officer should go upon such an errand, and so did Roderick for that matter; but we held our tongues about it, and presently we headed straight across the fiord for the snow slopes upon the farther shore. It was there I first began to perceive the Captain's object, and made some remark upon it.

"This place would not be charted, Mr. Farquharson," said I. He admitted that it was not.

"And you came with us to take some soundings," said I. He would not deny it.

"Yon berth's a little too rock-bound for the Captain's likings, Mr. Strong. I think he'll be moving the ship."

"Ah," said I, "he'd lie snug here, Mr. Farquharson."

"And be able to cock an eye at visitors before they dropped in upon him, sir."

He nodded his head significantly, and no more was said. The shore itself proved to be but a rough "hard" of solid ice, and it was droll to watch Mary casting longing eyes at the snow-fields so far above us. As for her skis, she might as well have brought a tennis-racket, and she was not backward in telling us so.

"Mark, are you not thoroughly ashamed of yourself for bringing me here?" she asked. I was indeed, but I would not have told her so for a fortune.

"Why, Mary," said I, "you have only to walk about five miles over those hills, and you will find a whole continent of snow. There's nothing else in Greenland but snow. Write and ask Dr. Nansen when we get back. This is too near the sea, that's all. Now can I help it?"

Well, she was very angry, and came as near to sulking as I can remember. Our little climb to the summit of a snowy hill near by did something to pacify her, for therefrom she could descry the distant mountains and have a vista of the eternal snows through the mighty ravines the glaciers had cut. In this way we passed an hour or two until it was time to return to the ship for lunch, and when next the boat was put overboard but Roderick and I and Billy Eight-bells were aboard her.

Now, that would have been about six o'clock of the afternoon. Nothing beyond the ordinary had happened on the ship during the day, nor had there been any sign on the Captain's part that he was aware of the existence of a certain adventurer of the name of Mitchell. Thus it came as a surprise to every man aboard when, at three bells in the first dog-watch, the hands were turned up and the ship moved to a new anchorage. Half an hour afterward the launch was made ready, and we embarked as I have said.

Whither were we going, and upon what errand? I would tell you in a word that we were going ashore, secretly, if we could, to discover the truth of Dead Man's Cave and the meaning of the letter which the mad Osbart had written to us. Knowing well that Mitchell's men would be on the look-out, we headed the launch as though for the open sea; then ran straight for the great headlands of the outer harbour, and did not cease to run until their spurs hid us from the observation both of those in the ship and on the shore. So, at last, we called an easy, and, taking rifles in our hands, Roddy and I leaped ashore as we could and left Billy alone in the launch.

"We shall be a couple of hours gone, and perhaps more, Billy," I shouted after him. "Stand by here if the light's strong, but we'd sooner have you in the bay if you can manage it. Mr. Farquharson will show you where we went ashore this morning. We'll look for you there to begin with — here if you fail us."

He bawled back that he understood, and headed the launch for the open sea. A raging tide surged between the headlands and made it none too safe for an open boat. Roddy and I had leaped to the rocks anyhow; but when I looked back at the swirl of the sea below, the sharp, jagged reefs, and the steepness of the place, I could well wonder that we had got to the shore at all.

"It will have to be the bay, Mitchell or no Mitchell," said I to Roddy; "we'd never board the launch here. Let's pray that Billy has some sense in his head, for he's as like to look for us in London as anywhere."

He agreed to it, though, for that matter, I think the wonder of the scene, the grandeur of the steep above us, and the awful solitude of the headland were in his thoughts more than our safety or that of the launch. And well they might have been. I, who knew the place well, shuddered at its barren loneliness. And what must Roddy have thought of it?

"We'll have to skirt the bluff and work round by the snow glacier at the back, Roddy," I said to him; "we should then come out at the lake-side, and be able to make the cavern. I'll know the place well enough if you put me at the water's edge; it's the getting there I fear."

"To say nothing of Jo Mitchell going fishing on a fine April evening, Scribe. I don't like the look of it, old chap. I never saw such a dead man's land in all my life."

"Well," said I, "it was alive enough when Black was here. These rocks could tell some fine tales, Roddy. I wonder how many poor devils lie in the snow beyond them. Dante never beat this in his wildest dreams. It's just as though we had left the world altogether."

He would not dispute it: the spell of the place lay heavy upon him as upon me. Every step upward, every advantage we gained upon the steep was a new rung in the ladder of a weird enchantment. The danger of our ascent hardly occurred to us. I think we feared that a voice would speak to us out of the bowels of the rock and that we should flee in terror.

Of course, we did nothing of the kind. A man can accustom himself to most things if he gives his reason a chance; and we were soon happy amidst the desolations all about us and ready to laugh at them. The monstrous birds that went whirring from their nests; the strange play of light in the ravines; the echoes of our whispers magnified to great sounds ceased to daunt us when we had gone a little way; and by and by we were jesting about them. Old climbers, who had "bagged" the Dent Blanche and other famous peaks in Switzerland, we made short work of the bluff directly we set ourselves seriously to the task; and soon we had circumvented it and were dropping down to the glacier on the far side.

I would tell you that the shore was now hidden

from us for a spell, and that we seemed to be in a great pit of ice — as deep a pit as Sindbad the Sailor lay in when the great bird took a fancy to his diamonds. All about us were needles of black rock, wild ravines, and a solitude beyond any imagination dreadful. We had feared crevasses in the glacier; but the few we discovered were of no great depth, and it being unnecessary to cross them, we followed the banks of a river of ice, and presently gained the higher ground on the far side. Here a disquieting thing happened, for we heard a rifle-shot very clearly, and then a second, echoing over the hills as though a hidden enemy enveloped us. For quite a long while we stood and listened, uncertain whether the shots had come from the outer basin or the distant lake. But we could make nothing of them, and drawing a little closer together and watching every spur of the rock as though a man were hidden by it, we gained a height and saw the ship again. And then in a flash we discovered a strange truth.

A long-boat was being rowed round the *Celsis*, and fully twenty men were aboard it. I could see, even in the uncertain light, that our own gangway ladder had been drawn up, and that the whole of the crew stood to attention on the deck. Captain York himself appeared to be parleying with the strangers from a station near the aft-deck house. But why the rifles had been fired or what was the meaning of that attack I had not a notion, nor Roddy either, for that matter.

"Does he think to play the pirate himself and loot us in the open day?" said I. "Why, Roddy, he could hang for that, if we get back to Europe."

"If we get back, old chap ——"

I looked at him sharply. His imperturbable face had not lost its imperturbability, but there was something in his eyes I had never seen before.

"Do you think it's as bad as that, Roddy?"

"As what, my boy?"

"As your thoughts, Roddy."

Well, he dwelt upon it a moment, and then he spoke.

"Look here," he said, with unwonted emphasis, "if those Yanks believe there is gold in Black's house, do you think they mean us to get back to Europe?"

"But, Roddy, we are not old women ——"

He laughed.

"You always say that, Scribe. I'm just putting the thing to you. Do they mean us to get back? If the skipper hadn't moved the ship to-day, would there have been any ship to move to-morrow? You know you don't believe it."

"That's to say that they would have mined the rock above us?"

"Of course it is. I guessed that long before Mitchell came aboard. It was the rock I was looking at last night when I took my glasses ——"

"Oh," I cried, "what a devilish thing ——"

"You may well say that, though I don't suppose Jo Mitchell cares much for a pious opinion. He'd have blasted the rock above us, and the ship would have gone down like a stone. Well, we're holding four aces on that, and he's got to see us. That's what he's been trying to do to-night."

"And the skipper fired a shot or two to keep up his spirits. I wish we were aboard, Roddy."

"What's the good of wishing — we're not. Surely York's capable of dealing with that lot. They're heading off already, don't you see?"

"And running for the open. Then they'll come slap on Billy and the launch."

It was too true. The long-boat was now being rowed from the ship straight for the headlands, and would certainly discover what we had done. It was ten to one we should have the gang on our heels before another hour had passed.

"Will Billy come ashore, do you think?" I asked next. Roddy was sure he would not.

"He's no fool, though he looks one. You get the laugh of the world when you've a mug like Billy's. I'll bet he finds a way out; you see if he doesn't. Hallo, though, I don't like that!"

He caught my arm in his excitement, and we stood together to listen to a sudden roar of a great gun — not the echo of a rifle shot this time, but of cannon — to which the very hills reverberated. Such a

surprising thing struck us dumb. We just looked at each other and waited.

"It must have been the echoes, Roddy. Do you remember last night?"

"But, my boy, that was a shot from the headland, from the place we have just left. Good God, and we thought ourselves alone there!"

"Anyway," said I, with more composure, "it was not at old Billy they fired; they'd have done it long ago if he had been their target. There must be others ashore, Roddy; there must be——"

Well, I did not dare to finish with it. A freshet of thought had come to me, and I might share it with no other. Just as I had heard the voice of the dead pirate when we sailed after the rogues of Dolphin's Cove, so in my heart did I believe that I might hear it again amid this desolation. Call it folly, hallucination — what you will, the fact stood stubborn and unconquerable. Roddy, on his part, knew that I was keeping something back, and pressed me to the issue.

"There wasn't a third expedition, Mark. What do you mean by others?"

"Do ships' guns go off by themselve ? Th was a ship's gun they fired; I knew the sound t well."

"Then it was a ship's gun ashore. I'll swear i fired it from the headland."

"But not at Billy; I'll answer for that."

"Should we go back, do you think?"

" A lot of good we'd do. I say, push on while the luck is with us. That boat may be our salvation if there are others in the haven. I'll trust to York for the ship. He's worth half a dozen Jo Mitchells any day, and he knows just what Billy Eightbells is doing."

I hardly waited for his answer, so reasonable did the thing seem; and soon the pair of us were threading the glacier's path again, and the ship and the outer basin were lost to our view. Half an hour of stiff climbing brought us to a ravine through which we could espy the shore of the great lake, and down this we ran in our excitement. We had won our way whatever the danger, and in an hour we should know the truth.

I can hardly tell you of the medley of strange sensations which accompanied me to the lake-side, or the vivid memories which troubled me. Though it was past seven o'clock of the evening, a full red sun still shone in the western sky and flooded the lake with a sheen of glorious radiance. Wide over this world of desolate waters the crimson rays were winged until they struck upon the infinite whiteness of the distant snow fields and fired the mountain peaks as with living flame. Such grandeur, such a sense of vast spaces, such glory of Nature in her loneliness, few men live to see.

Upon this sense of the majesty of the place there came my memories of the day when I had visited it

with the mad Osbart; when he had told me why the pirates had made it their home; had pointed out the deserts to which the prisoners were driven; had shown me the great ice-caves in which the dead had been immured. Black had been King of Ice Haven then, and all had obeyed him. Could he but rise from the dead this night, with what a fury of cruelty and lust would he not drive the intruders out! But Black lay at the bottom of the great ocean, and men were free to come and go as they listed in this, the kingdom he had ruled.

I would tell you that the lake hereabouts is of vast extent; that there are sheer cliffs to the northward, but a kindly shelving shore to the south, and that this leads up by shallow terraces to the Caves of the Dead. Naturally, our first thought, when we threw ourselves down upon the snows of the beach, was of Mitchell and his men, who now occupied Black's old house on the farther shore, and would hardly cross the lake unless they had Osbart's story. So we thought that we lay in some safety for the time being, and might visit the galleries at our pleasure.

"There are rocks enough on the hill side," said I, "and it's hardly likely they will spy us out in such a light. You shall play sentry, Roddy, and I will go into the caves. Of course, I don't expect to do more than reconnoitre; but if there is any truth in the story of the gold, then I'll learn it or call myself

a fool. The first thing is to avoid a surprise. It would take them twenty minutes in a launch to cross the lake. We can make a bolt for the ship directly they get afloat, and if Billy is not there, the skipper will take us off. That's the best I can think of, and if you've anything better——"

He puffed hard at his great pipe, and seemed to be turning the matter over in his head. The lake was as silent as the waters of death; not a breath of wind stirred in the hills; the sun continued to shine with diminishing splendour; while the glow upon the heights changed from a deep crimson to wondrous hues of pink and violet.

"Well, Roddy, and what do you say? You take a long time about it."

"I was thinking, old chap."

"Of what?"

"Of the gun that was fired from the headlands. Suppose it was at Billy, after all? Suppose Mitchell's lot are on this side?"

"Their ship's not, anyway. Take my glasses and see. There's a yacht lying at anchor right over against Black's house. Why, my glass would almost show you a man on her decks; and it's sense to say that where the yacht is, there will the best part of the crew be. You don't suppose Jo Mitchell would desert his ship?"

"No, but ——"

"But what, Roddy?"

"Well, it's odd that we don't see any men. I've been watching the place ever since we dropped down here, and there isn't a sign of life anywhere — not as much as a hand's breadth of smoke nor the smallest of boats. They wouldn't have turned in at this time of night ——"

"Of course they wouldn't; they'd be all ashore, eating."

"Tinned meat, I suppose. Didn't you say that you saw some smoke when you climbed on the boom last night?"

I had to admit it; and really it was very odd that there was no witness of any kind to human occupation of the galleries on the far shore. My glasses were powerful enough to show me the yacht very plainly, and, beyond the yacht, the steep cliff wherein Black had built his home. I could see the iron ladder by which you gained the height, the rude windows cleft in the rock, and, farther up the shore, the low buildings in which the pirates had been housed. These buildings were now a heap of blackened ruins, for the Government ships had destroyed them; but it was odd, nevertheless, that no human being showed himself anywhere upon that side; nor could I gainsay Roddy's view of it.

"You're right about the place," I admitted at length, "but that doesn't alter my opinion. If we're going to lie here and speculate as to what might happen, we may as well throw up the sponge at once.

Let's risk it while we're in the mood, Roddy. We shall never get a better chance; and as for Mitchell's men being on this side of the water — well, I'm ready to take my luck with them ——"

"You're always ready to take your luck anywhere Scribe. Don't think me a tenderfoot — I was a bit anxious, that's all; but, if you give the word, we'll go at once."

"Then I give it now, and luck go with us. Remember, one call brings me back to you. We mustn't muddle it. I shall know there's danger if I hear you whistle, and that's all you have to remember."

He said that he understood; and upon that we set out. The climb to the mouth of the caves was light work enough, and what we had seen (or had not seen) upon the farther shore encouraged us to go with little prudence.

Every step now carried me nearer to a recognition of my surroundings. I could point to the track around the lake by which Osbart and I had first come to this place; I saw the narrow ledge upon which a man must walk to reach the outermost of the galleries; I recognized the hill wherefrom we had discovered the distant shore and the ocean beating upon it. And there I left Roddy.

It was not a time for sentiment, and yet I think we were both a little troubled at that parting. For a moment I thought he was wistful to call me back

after I had left him; but when I turned round he had found a nook behind a boulder of the rock, and there he sat smoking his great pipe as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world for him to be playing a sentry's part. Twenty yards farther on I gained the ledge of the rock and the entrance to the cavern. A wan light enveloped me immediately, my eyes saw but dimly in the deep shadows, and I stood wondering if I would have the courage after all.

Remember how different a thing it had been when the mad Doctor went with me upon a similar journey. I had nothing to fear then from unknown enemies; I knew little of what I must see or of the horror of the place. Now, dread of the caverns fell upon me heavily at the outset; I groped my way fearfully, while there was ever with me the dread that I might lose my bearings and be lost here in this dismal place beyond any hope of seeing the sun again.

I say that what affected me chiefly was the dim light within the cavern and the almost black darkness of the narrow passage beyond it. There had been ship's lanterns lighting this when Osbart took me there; and some of them remained, as my hands told me while I felt my way by the jagged wall. When I struck a match I saw that the lantern was all rusted, while water dripped from the roof, and the path itself was littered by boulders of the rock. Thenceforth the way became more difficult. I

stumbled and came near to falling more than once. The darkness grew so profound that I could not see my hand before my face.

And what foreboding through it all; what listening for any sound that might speak of friend or foe; what fears of the void and its unknown terrors! Sometimes I would say that I must slip through a crevasse of the rock and fall headlong to vast depths. Or I would disturb a boulder, and hear it go clanging down behind me, filling the cavern with its thunders, and setting my heart aflutter as though other hands than mine had hurled it. When light came at last, I feared it almost as much as the dark. What truths of this black world might it not reveal? And I knew that the dead lay near me, and that I must look upon their faces.

These fears I put behind me a little as the light waxed stronger, and it became apparent to me that I was alone in the cavern. Now I could see that the passage led into a large apartment, one I remembered to have visited with the Doctor, and I did not fail to notice that the door of this inner cave was fended by a great stone, which had been rolled back many years ago, but still lay so that a man who would enter must clamber over it. This I did quickly enough, anxious to make an end of it; and no sooner was I upon the other side than I stood in the presence of the dead, and knew that my goal was achieved. Achieved — if it be not irony to write the word. For

was not that the moment when I heard the thundering echo of the great stone as it rolled back to its place, and, turning, knew that it had trapped me in that fearful den, the prisoner of the impotent dead, whose staring eyes mocked me as they lay?

CHAPTER VIII

THE ORDEAL OF THE CAVERN

A MAN thinks of many things when dire peril confronts him; perhaps of his own safety last of all.

I supposed at the first that the great stone had stood upon a balance, and had been so nicely poised that my weight set it sliding to the aperture. A second thought put this by, and would have it that human hands had done the thing and trapped me beyond any hope of release.

Of the suppositions, the latter was the more dreadful. It seized me in the grip of fear and sent me running back to the stone, my wit clean gone from me and my heart beating wildly. I thought that human eyes were watching me, and that men listened for my words. In a paroxysm of terror, I hurled myself at the stone, and pressed upon it until my hands were cut and bleeding and my clothes torn. Then I reeled back, and, sinking upon the floor of the cavern, I cried aloud to Roddy, as though he would hear me, out there by the lake-side.

Here I make no defence. The Cave of the Dead at Ice Haven is as terrible a mausoleum as the world knows. Three walls of it shaped from the rock, the

fourth is of pure ice, and in this wall the bodies of the pirates lie. Time does not change them; to-day they are as yesterday; and all the mockery of life is to be read in their staring eyes. You might even think that they would answer if you spoke to them, and never shall I forget the hour when the mad Osbart called upon them to rise up that he might hear their voices and lead them back to the ship they had served so well.

And in this place I had been trapped. It might be by an accident of the stone; it might be by the design of those who had raced us to the haven for the treasure! Who shall wonder that the extremity of the peril drove me to such despair that I write of it even here with reticence.

How long this mental distress endured I am not able to say. The deep stillness of the place did not suggest the passing of time nor any hour of day or night. Such sounds as I heard were of the trickling of water amid the stalagmites and the drip from the rock, where a puny spring bubbled upon the dank floor. My supposition that human hands had trapped me grew less sure as the minutes passed, and at length I began to doubt it. For if it had been the truth, why did the men leave me here, and what was their motive? Did they think my friends would desert me at a nod or that the ship would weigh anchor and sail because the owner of it was lost ashore? This was not to be imagined. I came to

see that a natural happening had contrived my imprisonment, and that in one hour or two I should be a free man. Roddy would miss me, and make his way back to the yacht. The skipper himself would come ashore and bring a party. I could not doubt it; and, hope quickening, I stumbled to my feet and began to search the cavern.

Now, I think for the first time, I remembered with what object I had come ashore. Osbart's letter from Parkhurst prison was still in my pocket, and I touched it with my fingers, ironically and in mockery. Of what profit to me were all the gold in the world while I lay trapped here in the very bowels of the earth, and knew not whether I would be alive or dead when the sun rose?

This was a truth I would not make light of; but, none the less, curiosity stood with it and would not be denied. Disdain the treasure as I might, the desire to know the truth about it prevailed and set me prying about the cavern. Line by line I recalled the strange document which had come to me from the prison. "Go where dead men's fingers point." So Osbart had written; and, shudderingly I turned and looked back at the tomb. Was it true that the outstretched hand of a dead pirate would show me the place? I feared almost to look; a cold sweat stood upon my forehead.

And yet the truth was there. Looking for the second time, and telling myself that the place was

making a coward of me, I saw the fingers to which the writing referred, grown white as a woman's in the ice. Beyond them, lay the distorted, horrible face of a dead man, whose eyes were bent toward the flags at my feet. I remembered that I had matches, and struck one of them. The faint light drew me downward. I felt about with my hands, and then I knew.

A grey stone, laid in the very centre of the floor, had been newly stirred. I could see the imprint of heavy boots about it, and the marks of the nails with which they were shod. And I did not doubt that this had been the chamber of the treasure.

But again, had not Osbart written those cryptic words, "Turn the crescent of the tomb?" And what could the meaning of them be? A long while I searched vainly for the idea which lay behind the madman's message. Then it came to me suddenly that the wall of the cavern hereabouts jutted out in the shape of a crescent, and that when a man had turned the wall he stood upon the brink of the hiding-place, and might discover the flag at a step. All this, I say, after long debating in the silence of the place, and with all the unceasing mockery of the quest, the sure knowledge that it was without interest for me!

Without interest? Why did I say it? For if this flag had been lifted, was not the treasure already taken? And by whom? Not by Mitchell's men,

surely; for, had that been so, he would have weighed anchor and sailed for New York the day he did it. By whom, then? By those who fired the gun at Mitchel's ship! Oh, surely that was something to think upon, something to set my brain aflame.

I have told you that I struck a match to examine the floor of the cavern, and I would say that this discovery of matches in my pocket was the first piece of good fortune I knew that night. My watch now told me that it was past eleven o'clock, and though I held it to my ear and listened, to be sure that it had not tricked me, I could not pass by its warning.

Three hours must have passed since I had entered the cavern; three hours should have brought Roddy to the place, and the Captain with him. I thought of his disquietude at my absence, of the curiosity it would awake, and of what would be done when I did not come. Possibly he had entered a little way into the galleries and listened; but then, had I not hailed him again and again, lifting my voice vainly, and having no answer but those of the haunting echoes? And he had not come; I was alone with the dead, whose fingers still pointed at me in mockery.

With this my courage could not bear, and it gave way utterly at last. I saw myself starved in the tomb; living terrible hours; deserted by those who should have been the first to come to me; dying as dreadful a death as a man may know. The realities of my

position could no longer be denied. The dead had trapped me, and with them lay the victory.

But I shall dwell no longer upon such a situation or the price I paid for it. I had passed from the rigours of terror to a sullen and inevitable submission; had abandoned hope, perhaps, and ceased to think about it at all, when first I heard the tread of a foot in the passage, and sprang to my feet as a man possessed. Oh, madman, I thought, to believe that your friends would desert you; fool to make so much of a mishap which a little measure of prudence would have averted! For what had it all been but a slip of the great stone, an hour or two of waiting, and then the good friends from the ship, and the strong arms, and the welcome home. So I thought of it as I ran to the door, and climbing upon the rock bawled "Roddy" with all my lungs. And when he did not answer me, I repeated the cry until the very vault rang with it. "Roddy, Roddy, I am here in the cave; the stone has shut me in; don't you understand?"

There was no reply; not so much as a whisper. Had the stone shut the aperture completely, I could have understood it; but there was a space as broad as a man's hand at the head of it, and but for the formation of the rock I could have looked into the gallery beyond. And more surprising than the silence of those who had come to the cavern was the shuffling of footsteps I now heard distinctly, and then the clang as of some implement, and at last the whisper of

voices and the glint of a lantern seen through the interstice. Now I knew that my friends were not there, and instantly bethought me of Mitchell's men. What could their coming mean but a fulfilment of the threat?

Well, I dropped down quietly from the stone and began to blame myself bitterly for leaving my rifle with Roddy when its possession would have meant so much to me. True, I had my revolver, and that would serve me better, perhaps, in the confined space where the fight must be. Drawing it immediately and looking to the chambers, I stepped lightly to the further and darker end of the great cave, and there crouched as a dog waiting for the attack. My blood was up and all fear of the place now cast behind me. Memories of the days I had lived in Ice Haven when Black was King, some recollection of the night when I had bearded the great pirate himself and saved my life by so doing, stood by me and helped me to a resolution. These men might kill me, but some of them should pay a price. And so I waited for them, kneeling in the shadow and listening to the beating of my heart. What an intolerable interval of delay! Why, I could count the very blows of their picks as they worked at the great stone. The temptation to make an appeal to them surged to my lips and needed all my courage to keep back. It must come, I said, this issue of life or death; why, then, should it not come quickly?

Here was a question which the rocks themselves at length bent to answer. I saw that the great stone had begun to slip inward toward the cavern and was inclining inch by inch toward me. Presently it gave a lurch and came bounding down with a mighty thud, raising clouds of the white dust and nearly choking me. Springing to my feet, I had my pistol at the cock and waited for the onset. The dust was slow to settle; the wan light in the cave appeared to be wholly blotted out by it; there was a new age of waiting, and then as some vivid scene of a drama, the picture shaped itself.

I saw the dark figures of men; a lantern flashed in my eyes; some one advanced toward me and uttered my name.

"Osbart," I cried, reeling toward him as a man in a delirium.

He lifted his lantern, the old smile curled about his lips; he offered me his hand.

"I thought I would have good news for the Captain," he said, and without another word he turned and led me from the place.

CHAPTER IX

I SUP WITH OSBART

THERE were two men with the Doctor, and the lantern's light showed me that one of them was the man we had called Red Roger at Dolphin's Cove. The other was a stranger to me, a huge negro with green eyes and a merry face and lips which bulged ridiculously. These two waited for us to pass and they followed close upon our heels until we emerged from the gallery, and the lake itself was spread out to our view.

I write down this account of it in the common way; for no words of mine would tell you what was in my head — neither speak of my gratitude because they had fetched me out of the cave; nor of my wonder that they should be there at all. One thing is very sure: I had not a notion of Osbart's meaning when he talked about there being good news for the Captain. I walked as a man who dreams; the glorious view of the lake below me, of the snow-field and the majestic hills, had become as unreal as the scene at a theatre. I could not understand that it was intimately connected with all I had done and was doing. When at length I bethought me of Roddy and asked a question, there was no great desire to have an answer.

This madman had hypnotized me now as he had done when first I went aboard Black's ship.

For all that, his reply to my question was plain enough, and should have satisfied me.

"Your friend has returned to the yacht," he said, in his own way. "I will tell you more about him presently. We must go to the Captain now and lose no time. Am I wrong in thinking that you will be glad to see him?"

He walked by my side while he spoke, and we went down the slope toward a boat that waited for us at the water's edge. Something in his tone forbade me to treat his words lightly, and I had no desire to do so.

"Name your Captain to me," I rejoined with reserve, "and I will tell you whether I am glad or sorry."

He looked at me — the mad eyes were unchanged since the old days — and then he laughed softly.

"Ah," said he. "I can understand that," though what he understood and why he would not speak I knew no more than the dead. Then we came to the boat, and there, waiting for us, was no other than the hunchback whom my men had named Jack-o-'Lantern.

I was astounded to meet the fellow under such circumstances; nor could I make anything of them. The mystery of his appearance in my cabin on the *Celsis* had not ceased to be a matter of speculation among us; but here he sat at the tiller of the boat and hardly paid me the compliment of a nod. For that matter,

the men took their seats without a word and set out immediately to row to the farther shore.

The crossing occupied us a matter of twenty minutes or so, and our course lay toward the foot of the iron ladder by which you go up to Black's house. Though it was after midnight, a man might very well have seen to read a paper, and the whole of the foreshore and the high cliffs beyond it became plainly visible before we were half-way across.

At this time, too, I noticed Mitchell's yacht, but I thought she occupied a different berth from the one Roddy and I had spied out that afternoon. When we drew a little closer I observed that she had been beached on the snows and lay right over on her beam ends. This had been done while I was in the great cavern, and I fell to wondering if Roddy had seen anything of it. Osbart said that he had returned to the ship; but why he had returned and what his desertion of me meant, were riddles I would not attempt to solve. They were still unanswered when the boat drew up at the ladder's foot and the Doctor bade me go ashore.

"We are over late for the Captain," he said as he stepped out; "but, anyway, you will be glad to get back to your old quarters. They are changed and not all you could wish them to be. But we have done our best, and it is not for long. Should the Captain be gone aboard, I propose that we take supper together. Is that agreeable to you?"

Of course, I had to say that it was. There could be no thought of a rebuff at such a time or place; and, indeed, my curiosity now commanded me to go on at all costs. I believed that the mystery of Ice Haven was at length to be revealed to me — but of its full measure I had not an idea.

We mounted the iron ladder, Osbart showing the way, and the huge man named Red Roger coming at my heels. The door at the ladder's head leads, as you may remember, to a corridor cut from the rock; but while this had been elegantly furnished in Black's time, and the embrasures hung handsomely with crimson curtains, it was now bare as a barn — the hangings gone and the furniture smashed.

In the great dining-room which lies at the upper end of it, I found some pretence to decency of life; a little of the old luxury and more than a suggestion of recent occupation. Here a dining-table was laid for three and lighted by candles in silver sticks; while a wealth of plate decorated the white cloth. But as though to remind the diners that they were many thousands of miles from civilization, the floor of the apartment was covered by skins, chiefly of white bear; while great piles of the same served for couches round about. I thought, as I looked upon them, of that apartment in the Rue Joubert in Paris where I had first seen Black and his villainous crew — and I wondered that Osbart, the last alive of all that company, should have imitated his old leader here in far

Greenland. But, naturally, I made no mention of it, and we sat to the table without a word.

"Well," said I, for the remark could not be kept back, "we're not to see the Captain, anyway."

He looked at me out of those cunning eyes of his and answered almost naïvely:

"I think it better not. He is sleeping or he would be here. You remember the old adage. Well, then, we will just have supper together and talk about all this in the morning. I am sure you are very tired."

"Not so tired but that I must be thinking of my ship. You don't suppose that I have forgotten my friends."

"I suppose nothing of the kind. It is very natural that you should not, especially as you will not see them for a long time."

Well, I supposed that I laughed in my turn. Osbart's cool effrontery had ever been matchless; but that he should have attempted to play a leader's part, here at Ice Haven when all was changed and the master dead, seemed to be an irony.

"Come," said I, "we are not play acting, Osbart — and the gulf between to-night and the old time is hardly worth bridging. Had Black been here, there is no man living who would not have listened — but you, my friend, his part fits you badly."

He made light of it — and touched a gong upon the table. The negro who answered the bell was the very same who had waited upon me in the old days.

Nothing about him seemed changed. His very grin and the salutation "Good evening, sah," were familiar.

"Capen gone aboard ship," he said to Osbart; "will Massa Doctor take 'em supper now, or will he wait whiles?"

"Massa Doctor will take his supper immediately, Sambo. Hurry, my infant, I am not here for a month; hurry, I tell you."

The nigger went off like a shot, and Osbart seized upon a flagon of wine and poured himself out a bumper and another for me. His manner was now a little excited and menacing. I had seen him in this mood once before, upon the day when the prisoners were shot on the snow-fields; but why it should overtake him this night I could but hazard.

"Ourselves," he cried, spilling the wine upon the cloth as he lifted his cup; "our splendid selves and fortune! You'll drink to that, Strong."

"Certainly; it's a capital toast."

"I'll give you a better — the Captain."

"Well, I'll drink that. Anyway, he sent you to bring me out of the cavern."

He looked at me queerly.

"That's true — while you, you and your gang, would have left me to rot in Parkhurst until eternity. It's as true as the stars; I knew it when I wrote to you. Did you think of me when you fitted out your ship? No, by ——! You thought of the treasure —

and the man who showed you where the treasure was might have been ten thousand fathoms down in hell for all you cared. That's the story, Strong — there's the man whose life I saved this night."

"Then why did you save it, Osbart?"

"Why did I save it — have you no brains to think, then? Am I the master or the servant of the man who gave me life? Where would I be to-night but for him? Groping in a cell, beating at the walls with my bleeding hands; crying to them for God's sake to kill the madman. That's where I'd be. And where am I now? Why, upon the brink of the wide sea with the whole world for my prison. Free, I tell you, for all that I would do — free for vengeance; free to serve, to walk the old ways. That's what he has given me ——"

"Then you were rescued from Parkhurst?"

His eyes flamed at the thought.

"The Captain came for me. I'd dreamed of it a hundred nights. Awake or asleep I dreamed of the Captain. Dead or alive he would come to me. Red death before me or blood in my eyes, I saw the Captain coming. Then they brought me the letter. I asked no questions. The warder had been well paid, I said. He brought me the letter. That night I climbed the wall by the Governor's house and made my way down to the sea. A boat waited for me; I went aboard the ship. The sentinel who fired his rifle at me will never fire another. I wrung his neck with these hands — I

left him stark and dead upon the hill-side. But the boat put out to sea and we made the great Atlantic — and now the work begins and they shall pay; the uttermost farthing, if the deep runs red with blood."

I shuddered when I heard him. A madman he was; but the temper of his madness passed all comprehension. And this man, I said, had escaped from prison; he was free to work his dreadful will where he could. Such horror of Ice Haven I had not know in the days when Black had ruled — and this was an Osbart I understood for the first time.

But more than my loathing of his talk, of his wild threats and his insane confessions, more than these was the story he had put together so incoherently.

Who was this unknown friend who had rescued him from Parkhurst prison; who was the man he served?

All the wild dreams of my journey since the first day of it were made good in this place and at this table. Here for the first time I knew the truth and trembled when I heard it.

"Tell me," I cried, "for God's sake tell me — is Black alive?"

Well, he looked at me as though I were the madman.

"Is Black alive?"

"I am asking you — is it possible that he lives?"

He laughed wildly — horrid laughter that echoed under the vault of the great room. Then, taking a

candle from the table and regardless of the dish they had set before him, he rose and beckoned me to follow him.

We left the dining-room and went a little way down the wide corridor which runs the whole length of the cliff. There are rooms facing the lake at intervals here; and before the door of one of them he paused and lifted the candle aloft. Then he pulled a curtain and showed me what lay beyond. As in the great dining-hall, so here a table had been spread for dinner. There were five men sitting round about it, and for an instant I did not see that they were stone dead. But such was the case; and while one still had a cup in his hand, another held the very knife with which he had been cutting his food. So swiftly had the unseen death overtaken them that one of the younger men might have been still sleeping. The eyes of another were wide open and seemed to be looking at us. I saw that this man was Jo Mitchell, and that he alone among them had known both the pain and the fear of death.

"Well," cried Osbart, and his words echoed terribly in the dark room, "do you ask me the question now, Strong?"

But I had turned away, sick and faint at the spectacle; and worn out and overcome by all I had seen and heard, I tumbled in a dead stupor, and knew no more until the fresh night air brought me to my senses; and I saw that I was being carried out of the galleries to the cabin of a ship.

CHAPTER X

THE AVENGER

THERE was a small port above my bunk and I could see the green water running over it, as it were a cataract; and by this I judged that the cabin lay deep in the bowels of the ship and must be upon the lowest of its decks.

This was but an early impression; for I lay a long while, hardly conscious of my situation, and my memory clean gone concerning the events in the cavern. Once before had I opened my eyes in such a cabin as this — but that was upon the Nameless Ship and could be no more thought of.

I should tell you that the roof above me was arched as though the cabin had been built in a tunnel. Here in this dome there was a cluster of electric lights, and these showed me the elegant furniture of the place, which could hardly be matched for good taste on any ship afloat. Chiefly of polished Spanish mahogany, there were drawers and cupboards everywhere; a little library of books upon a shelf above the bed and a table for writing upon the opposite side. At my bed's head there stood a dial for calling the servants — as you may see in any modern hotel; and the number

of things named upon it could not but set a man wondering.

As to the carpet, that was of skins; a fashion prevalent at Ice Haven and imitated here. I knew that there would be a bath below the rugs with which the floor was covered, and I was not at all surprised to see many of the panels of the woodwork covered with pictures of the French school; for that had been the practice upon the Nameless Ship and would be followed here. For the rest there was a greater elegance, but less space than in my former cabin; and even at the outset I could say both that the new vessel was faster than the old and very much smaller.

Why I had the latter impression I do not know. All my thoughts were vague enough; while my eyes were fascinated by the spectacle of the clear green water running over the thick glass of the porthole, and by the changing hues of it. These had been little varied at the beginning, but by and by there came a swift transition; from the purest greens to the most wonderful vivid colours of the spectrum, wherein one had the chromatic of the rainbow — the purest blues, the brightest yellows, and the deepest shade of purple.

There never was a more beautiful picture than this nor one more amazing. If I had guessed at hazard what it meant, I would have said that the sun shone down through the water; but this account seemed poor enough. It was not until I had a sudden vision of

white ice, apparently so near the ship that a man might have touched it with outstretched hand, that I understood.

The boat was running between the bergs which float about Ice Haven — and she was running at so great a speed that her plates trembled visibly.

All this, I say, occupied my mind while I lay upon my bed and tried to think about my situation and the events which had led up to it.

Whose ship was I upon, and how had I come there? I could distinctly remember my visit to the great cavern, but the more momentous events of the night were forgotten at the first. When they shaped themselves anew for me, I thought of them as of some dream of my sleep which it were idle to recall. Osbart himself remained in the background as a figure of the shadows which would melt away with the sun. And upon all this were the realities of the cabin and of the green seas flowing by my window. Surely that were true enough and might have spoken to me.

Such a mood will sometimes attend heavy sleep in a strange bed; and it is often followed by intervals of clear thought, when all that we have done and said is remembered to the minutest particular. So it was with me that day. From my troubled dreams, I awoke at last to recall the scene at supper, and the secrets of the room, and to hear Osbart telling me that Black still lived. Dwelling upon it I crossed the floor

of the room and tried the door of my cabin. To my great wonder it was not locked, and I found myself peering down a narrow corridor brilliantly lit with electric lights. Then I returned to the bed and rang the bell.

Whose ship was I upon, and how had I come there? Was Osbart lying to me when he answered my question; was it the truth, as I had believed it might be, a truth passing all hope and expectation? Did the man who had ruled the high seas during the terrible years, the Master of the Nameless Ship, the enemy of the nations — did he live? Well, that was what I should learn before many hours had passed. And learning it — ah, what then?

Now, my bell was answered, not by the negro as I had expected, but by Osbart himself; and a man so changed I had never seen before. Not only had the quick excited way of speaking left him; but his manner was that of the old time, bright and witty and full of kindliness. Coming over to me as he had come the very first day I saw him, he sat by my bedside and gave me a cheery "Good morning."

"Do you know," he said, "that it is almost midday?"

"Midday — then I must have slept the clock round?"

"I shouldn't wonder. There's no medicine like it — and yet, my dear fellow, sleep is so near death that a man must look twice to tell the difference."

"Well," said I, "you begin with a jolly subject for the time of day. Midday or midnight, how am I to tell the difference down here?"

He raised his eyebrows.

"Down here! Come, that's gratitude. And we have given you the best quarters in the ship."

"The best quarters in the ship? Now you're joking, Osbart."

He smiled again and pointed to the window.

"Ice Haven is becoming as fashionable as Portsmouth," he said. "There's hardly a month in the year when one warship or the other does not cruise hereabouts. So, you see, we prefer deep waters. Black will bring her up when it's safe to do so. But not an hour before, believe me."

"Then she is a submarine?"

He appeared to be surprised that I should put the question.

"What else should she be? If the Captain is to stand against the world once more, will anything but a submarine serve him? We could have built the Nameless Ship anew, but the day for that has gone by. Let a tramp be taken, and the word will go round to every navy in the world. So Black is wise and lies where few will search for him. I'll tell you more. There was an American gunboat at Ice Haven last night when he steamed out. I dare say it wanted a word with your friend, Jo Mitchell. I hope the skipper will like it when he gets it."

He was much moved, and, walking to and fro, he ran on again before I could put in a word.

"Man, don't forget that it was Black they hunted. My God, the fools. To hunt down a man like that in his own seas; to think that he could be trapped at the Haven. They'll pay the price now as many another will know, and pay it before the year has run. You are the lucky one, Strong. You do what you please, and you know it."

I waited until the mood passed and then I asked him a question.

"Is it for my own pleasure, then, that I am caged down here, separated from my friends and carried God knows to what sea? Is it for my pleasure, Osbart?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That is Black's affair. But for you the great ship would be afloat to-day. If he remembers it when you meet him, God help you. I'll say more: Your friends are lucky people. Don't make any complaint about them. They may thank God the Captain has some humanity in him and remembered your name. You know it, Strong; you know what Black would do for you."

He spoke with some kindliness now — and, indeed, it was an extraordinary thing that this man, who was stark mad ashore, had but to step upon a ship to become the gentlest of creatures so far as his speech judged him. I knew that he was a madman; knew that he had committed crimes at which a man's blood

might run cold — and yet to quarrel with him was the most difficult thing in the world.

"Well," said I, in answer to his question, "Black saved my life from his crew as many days as I was on board with him. I shall never forget that — but for the others, why, if it lay in my power, I would sink this devil's craft and all on board her; and that's the solemn truth, Osbart."

He listened cynically and, as though unwilling to argue with me, he turned by another remark.

"You were wondering how the Captain escaped," he put it to me. I said that I must suppose he had been picked up at sea.

"And no writer's marvel about it at all, Strong. When the Nameless Ship went down, our tenders were cruising those latitudes on the look-out for her. The third of them sighted the boat in which Black and you got off and picked him up. He left you where you were, for I don't believe that even he could have saved your life from the men after what happened. But he got safe away to Greenland and then to the Brazils. There he lay in hiding more than nine months; when he faced the music once more, it was to visit his copper mines at Nevada. Your story of his death put the police off the scent and saved his life. He found his partners staunch to him, and I believe he would have given up the piracy then but for the madness of those who hunted down what was left of the old crew. He was in Italy nine months,

and then at Brest. It was there that he met the French engineer Guichard, who built this submarine."

"Guichard — Guichard — the man who was so shamefully treated by his own people?"

"The very man, who would have made the French the first naval power in Europe if they had listened to him. But the gutter scum at Brest stoned him out of the town for nigger driving — and Black bought his ship."

"Why should he buy it, Osbart; what does he think he will do with it?"

"What will he do with it? Can you ask? Will he not hunt them down like vermin? It's true, by ——! He will sweep the seas before he has finished. I heard his oath to do it, and I am not thin-skinned. Well, it turned me cold. Black is the longest-armed enemy that ever lived, Strong. Remember that, when you begin to preach to him. And he has his treasure to salve — the treasure you went hunting! Why, the rocks might laugh to think of it."

His taunt stung me, and I answered hotly.

"I did not know that Black lived. Why should I not have gone? The whole world believes him to be dead."

"The whole world! Not so, surely? They were talking of his escape at Paris five months ago. The Government at Washington knows it for certain. I don't believe the English Admiralty is ignorant. And I'll tell you what, Strong. We are in for the

prettiest time that ever was known in all this universe. There will not be a warship on any sea which will be out of the game presently. I doubt if we will find safe anchorage from China to Peru. And we can last but ten days afloat — ten days, and then we lie like a log for any gun to smash. That's what Black is doing now. Is there any other man afloat who would take the risk?"

"There certainly should not be. How many weeks do you give him, Osbart?"

He laughed and rose as the sound of an alarm echoed through the ship.

"How many weeks? Perhaps not one. You had better ask him yourself, for we are going up and may breathe again. That's the signal. Come out and see the sun — who knows, we may never see it again!"

And with that he was gone from the cabin; and, full of wonder, my hands a-tremble and my heart beating, I began to dress myself.

Was I not going to meet Captain Black once more?

The dead had risen, I said — and he who had ruled the seas had returned unto his kingdom.

CHAPTER XI

THE BEGINNING OF THE TERROR

I HAVE told you that an alarm bell rang loudly through the ship, and immediately upon it we began to rise from the deep of the sea.

Presently, the water which had flowed over the glass of my port gave place to a rich flood of light as though the sun shone full upon a green wave and gave it a hue as of pure gold. At the same moment a delicious current of cool air flooded the cabin, and was like a breath of new life to all who breathed it. I heard the clanging of steel doors, and then the loud voices of men. The engines of the submarine had ceased to revolve, and we lay in the trough, rolling to a gentle swell and hardly lifting to the wash of it.

I had dressed myself by this time and was ready to go on deck. Notwithstanding Osbart's threat, I had no fear of Black, nor of his vengeance; while his men had never been more than a menace to me while he was in command. If I can tell you little of other thoughts, of an overwhelming sense of captivity and of a dire dread of the days which I must live through, you will understand my difficulty. Above all, there stood the curiosity to see the man and the

ship. These would have taken me to the deck whatever the risk.

At the first, I had some difficulty to find my way to the companion ladder at all. The long corridor, into which my cabin opened, appeared to lead to the depths where the engines lay, and I was at a standstill, when Osbart suddenly called to me from a little door upon my right hand. I followed him to a circular iron stairway which carried us immediately to the open. We were now upon the platform of the *Zero* (for such was the name of Guichard's vessel), and the sea washed up almost to our feet.

Imagine a long fish-shaped craft, not unlike a monster torpedo; scale it with solid silver plates, gleaming in the sunshine; flatten its back so that twenty men might lie thereon, and you have my first impression of the *Zero*. When I had looked a little longer, I perceived that there was a kind of conning-tower forward, and that this had wide glass windows which could be sheathed with steel. Immediately aft of us, in a dome of steel with a heavy glass port, there glistened the barrel of a gun. The latter was the only evidence of armament anywhere upon the ship, which might have been the counterpart of the submarines I had seen at Portsmouth, saving on'y that she was very much longer, and that her upper plates were of this bright metal which shone like silver in the sunshine.

All this I perceived almost at a glance. The strange craft had that simplicity of design which a landsman

associates with a submarine. Her secrets lay below, in the dark places of her engine-room, and could not even be guessed at by the inexpert; if, indeed (as I came to know afterward), the cleverest of engineers could have made anything of them. As to the men who lay about the platform, breathing the air as though it were life, I recognized four of them immediately, and they were the four who had come ashore to us at Ice Haven. A fifth wore better clothes, with fine brass buttons and was by all appearances a superior man, with a dark, cunning face and a black curl upon his forehead. I judged him to be about thirty years old, and could have said that he had spent some years in India. He was right forward, by the conning-tower, when we came up; and he turned and nodded to the Doctor in an affable way.

"Captain still in the arms of Morpheus, Doctor?" he asked. Osbart repl ed that he did not know.

"Well," the fellow ran on, "we ought to have an observation this morning if we're to pick up Number One to-night. But that's Black all over nowadays — he don't stir before the world is aired, and who's to blame him? I'd lie abed myself if you were making a wager about it, and win every time."

He laughed at his own humour as though so poor a thing pleased him mightily; and then, passing across his glass, he asked:

"Do your eyes make out anything on yonder skyline, or do they not? I've been telling myself for the

last ten minutes that there's a pair of funnels there. Am I dreaming it or is the glass crooked? Perhaps Mr. Strong will say? His eyes are young, and I don't suppose the whiskey has spoiled them."

He offered me the glasses, and merely pausing to tell myself that he had my name, I looked where he pointed. Sure enough, I could espy the shapes of two black funnels on the distant sky-line, and I told him so — at which he spat into the sea and then looked again for himself.

"If it's Riotti out of Spezzia," he said, "God keep him on the other tack. He's the man the Captain took out of the gutter to help him build the great ship. I heard at Genoa in the winter that he was after getting his Government to fit up a cruiser for this job. I shouldn't wonder if it's true. Well, he'll get treasure enough if the skipper runs across him. I guess he'll be able to take a first floor in hell, sure and certain."

He looked toward us as though we would applaud, and the great brute, Red Roger, who had come up to ask a question, bellowed like a bull at the sally. Presently, the three went aft together, and I was left at the gunwale, with the green waters of the Atlantic at my feet. The submarine herself hardly stirred to the lazy swell; the crew seemed to sleep in the sunshine; the wash of the sea was as a lullaby.

I have tried to describe this scene with what fidelity I can that you may understand the meaning of what came after. For myself, I was still as one who dreams,

yet knows that he is dreaming. The ship, the sea, the sleeping men, were all unreal to me. Osbart's story I flatly disbelieved. It seemed incredible that Black lived to command such a ship as this, and to begin again that career of lust and murder and robbery which the great tragedy of the Nameless Ship had ended. I could not realize where I stood. The distant funnels of the doomed gunboat seemed to mock me — the dark huddled figures were as shapes of my dreams.

I say that this was the truth, and yet, when awakening came it was swift enough. A soft foot-fall upon the platform caused me to turn about quickly. I saw a giant figure clad in a suit of blue overalls; I was conscious that a man stood beside me and looked out to sea. And then I knew; and as though the dead had risen suddenly from the heart of the sea, I cried out aloud that this was the great Captain; and I held my hand out to him.

Remember how this man and I had parted; recall the long hours I had spent with him, after the Nameless Ship went down, in an open boat on the broad Atlantic. Think of the days of terror through which I had lived with him, ashore and afloat; his piracies, robbery of great steamers, conquest of the sea as the pirate of old time never dreamed of conquest. Think of this and of the stupefaction which his deeds had caused in the maritime world, the panic among the seamen, the swift ordering of navies to take him; his flight from sea to sea; his defeat; his bruited death.

And now I stood beside him on the deck of the *Zero*, and could look upon a face stern set in anger, and understand that this was not the Captain Black who had saved me from the sea, but another whom I knew and feared exceedingly.

In truth, his greeting to me was little more than a nod. Tidings of the distant ship had come to him and held him engrossed. The dozing men, waked from their rest, watched him with covert glances. I saw the fellow in the smart clothes (he was engineer officer of the *Zero*, and the men called him Dingo) draw near and stand by expectantly. Osbart had come up, and his eyes were red and aflame. And then I heard the Captain's question:

"What do you make of her, Dingo?"

"Mighty little at present, sir — but I think she's Government."

"There was a German expedition to sail the third day of April. Would yon be a German ship?"

"I think not, sir. Dr. Schwartz, who sailed from Bremer Haven, took the old American liner *Breslau*. That's not the shape of it —— "

"And the syndicate that was formed at Lisbon?"

"I believe that their ship has not yet sailed, sir."

"It would be Riotti out of Spezzia!"

"I was thinking as much, sir —— "

"Then the Lord help him. The swine — that I lifted from the gutter! Him to hunt me! I'll tear his heart out of his body."

The man had always been terrible in anger, and was not less terrible now. Even his own crew shrank back from him when he turned about and cried, "Hands, stand by." The lust of blood and crime was upon them all; a silence as of death fell upon the ship while she began to forge slowly ahead and to approach the steamer, now shaping more clearly upon the horizon. Had I been asked to find a simile, I would have said that these men were as wolves who had nosed their quarry, their eyes shining red, their lips rolled back to show their shining fangs. For a word they would have struck me dead where I stood. I knew it, and for very life I held my tongue.

Thus it stood for the third part of an hour, perhaps. The doomed steamer showed clearly by this time, and was to be described as a smaller type of Italian gunboat. I heard afterward that she was named the *Vespa* (or the *Wasp*), and had been fitted out by the Italian Government nominally to cruise in northern waters; but in effect to follow the others to Ice Haven and there get the treasure if she could. As we saw her, she had two black funnels of the smoke-stack order, long and fretted at the tops, and a stumpy mast forward with a maintop for the quick-firing guns. Her capacity would have been five thousand tons, I suppose, and she carried some hundred and fifty men. So they told me when I came afterward to speak to her; but for the time being I saw but a warship of a common class, and remembered Black's

threat concerning her. How impotent it seemed; what a vain boasting. This puny submarine to destroy a warship on the broad of the ocean — I could have laughed aloud.

We were going full speed ahead for some while when next Black gave an order; and instantly upon his speaking the engines ceased to revolve and the ship did but glide through the water. I heard the clang of steel doors, then the hurrying footsteps of men upon the platform — but when I looked back there was no one there but Black and myself, and the doors of the conning-tower stood wide open. Motioning me to go down, the Captain entered the tower, and the steel plates closed behind us and shut us in beyond any hope if the ship were struck or sinking. But I thought little of that, for the spell of the descent and the place was upon me. We were going below the sea again; we were sinking down to the deep of the ocean to look upon a scene the eyes of man had never looked upon before. And the terror of it and the dread of it held me entranced; I forgot all else but the curtain of the waters and the world of the deep which lay behind them.

The ship sank slowly. It seemed an age before the seas closed over the cupola beneath which we sat; our eyes were down to the water-line, there was no longer anything to be seen but a waste of the swell and the frost of the spindrift upon the glasses — and now these vanished, and the waves surged round

about until a man might have believed that they would run cold upon his face presently and draw him down to the embrace of death. This awful sensation followed me to the deep. I shuddered at the devouring waters, and could have put up my hand to keep them from my mouth. I closed my eyes that I might not see them break through the glass and envelop us. And then I heard the signal-bell again, and looking up, I saw that Black had seated himself before a round marble table beneath the centre of the periscope, and that the scene above was depicted there as clearly as though a camera had photographed it in colours.

This was something I had never dreamed of, though I came to know its meaning by and by. It seems that we had sunk but a little way below the water, and that the cap of the periscope still rested above the waves. Powerful lenses in this cap played the part of a camera obscura and cast the images of sea and sky and ship down upon the table, prepared to receive it and hid from the light.

Hereon I saw the Italian gunboat as clearly as ever I saw anything in my life. The ocean itself looked glorious in its freshness; the waves rolled in gentle sport; the sky was serenely blue. And this endured for many minutes until we appeared to come so close to the gunboat that she towered right above us — an optical illusion, for I learned from Osbart afterward that we were still the third of a mile from her. At

last, however, the whole thing vanished in a flash; the glamour of the scene changed from sun and sea above to the sheen of the pellucid waters which had closed about us. I knew then that we had begun to sink below the gunboat, and the whole truth of it coming upon me in an instant, I turned and spoke to the Captain.

"Captain," I said, with what self-control I could, "you will let me speak — you heard me in the old days — for God's sake hear me now!"

He had been seated at the table and was still gazing upon the white marble as in the frenzy of a dream from which he would not awake. My words — and I would have spoken them if they had cost me my life — brought such a cry to his lips as I had never heard man utter before. All the passion, the madness, the agony of the dreadful years seemed to be expressed in it. For an instant he stood swaying as a man whose anger has blinded him utterly — I saw his hand go to the pistol in his pocket, and I wonder to this day that he did not blow out my brains. Another word of provocation and that would have been the end of it. But something, I may suppose, in my manner of speaking held him back. His hand fell impotently to his side; he looked me full in the face and answered me.

"So," he said, "you have known me, yet your lesson is not learned."

"It has been learned bitterly enough," I rejoined.

"God knows I have paid the price. Has it given me no right to save you from yourself?"

I hoped to move him, but the words were ill-said. A passionate gust of anger swept upon him again; he smote the table with his clenched fist, his eyes blazed when he answered me:

"Have you paid the price of this man's life, then? Do your fine words make me forget that I took him from the gutter and made him as my own brother? There's the truth. I fed and clothed him and gave him money. He, who had been a beggar, became the first man in Spezzia. And what's his gratitude to me? Look at yon ship. Would I be safe if I stepped aboard her? By all that's holy, he'd shoot me like a dog. That's Giuseppe Riotti — that's the man who shall pay the last farthing if the sea runs blood; I swear it on the Book. There's no power in heaven or hell shall keep me from his throat to-day — to-day, when my work begins and they shall know that I live."

I saw that it would be stark madness to say another word. Once before, when the prisoners were killed at Ice Haven, had such awful fury of his madness come upon him; and then, as now, I had drawn back shuddering and helpless. An hour hence and he would awake to knowledge of his crime and its meaning; but what an hour must be lived before that! Already he had rung the signal-bell and begun to manipulate the brass keys upon the index before him. I felt the submarine rise and remain motionless

beneath the water; the silence was profound when her engines had ceased to turn. We lay, it seemed, by the very keel of the Italian gunboat.

This was a wonderful moment, and I shall never forget it, though I was to live through many of the kind before my days upon the *Zero* were done with. Looking through the heavy glass of the tower, we could count every plate and bolt in the lower hull of the *Vespa;* or allowing her to pass us, we could see the whirl of the foam about her propellers, and say that she steamed straight ahead, unconscious of the danger. When she was lost to our view, the ebb of the foam gradually gave place to the green water again, and for all trace of her, the deep might have been void.

So weird was the spectacle, so new, so unimaginable, that other thoughts were forgotten in its presence. I lived in a wonder world, profound in its suggestion of miracle. Nor did I remember until the bells rang out again and the Captain's face compelled me to listen.

Black had seated himself at the table once more, and appeared to listen as though for an answering signal. The massive brows, the deep-set eyes, reflected many emotions. Now the face would be wholly evil; then a little softened; then puckered up as though in agony. And through it all the man sat motionless; until, of a sudden, the vessel shot backward, as though a monster grappling had caught her and was dragging her upward. Then the whole water

about the cupola began to surge and foam as if a tempest had struck the deeper sea; I heard a muffled roar as of some terrible explosion; we were lifted to the surface, and with a loud cry the Captain rolled the iron doors back, and the ocean gave up her secrets.

CHAPTER XII

THE "VESPA" IS FIRED

I HAD followed Black to the platform, and thither came the most part of the crew almost as soon as the bell had ceased to reverberate. Hot and stifling as was the air below, here it was gloriously fresh and cool; and for an instant the delight of breathing it forbade a thought of the hither sea and its story. But only for an instant. The submarine had hardly ceased to run when a shout of savage exultation spoke of our victory, and, looking over at the warship, I learned the truth at a glance.

She lay no more than a cable's length from us, the smoke pouring from her decks. It seemed to me that the *Zero* had fired her below the water-line, though how she had fired her, or by what devilish contrivance of a madman's brain, I could make no pretence to say. Evil enough to know that the work was done beyond any hope of salvation; and there the gunboat lay, sagging to the swell and already in the vortex of the flame. From her decks there went up such a wail of doomed humanity as I pray never to hear again. We could see her crew fleeing madly to the scanty rigging, fighting amidships, and even

cutting one another down at the very davits. Such officers as remained upon the quarter-deck stood motionless, as though paralyzed by swift catastrophe. The smoke, drifting to starboard, revealed the tongues of flame which drove the seamen headlong and already devoured the deck-houses and the bridge. And above it all were discordant voices, the oaths and curses and cries of men in their agony.

Such was the scene which I was called upon to witness as I stood upon the platform of the *Zero*. If I do not dwell upon it, I would say in excuse that there are pages of the human story which a man does well to turn quickly — and this was one of them. Far otherwise with the men who stood about me. I declare it beyond all compare horrible to have witnessed the frantic derision with which the monsters capered at the spectacle and scoffed at the agonies they had provoked. Not content with viewing their wretched victims at a distance, they must now drive the *Zero* toward the burning gunboat, and shout their obscenities almost into the very flames. For the poor souls, who flung themselves from the red-hot decks down into the trough of the cool sea, they had but scorn and contumely. I saw them draw revolvers and shoot one wretch whose beard still smoked and whose clothes had been burned from his shoulders. Another they beat off with an iron stanchion, and so much did the poor fellow suffer that he clung to the platform and implored them for God's sake to blow

out his brains. This they had done with as little compunction as a man may kill an ox, when there came the crack of a revolver-shot from the blazing vessel, and the great Russian whom I had seen at Dolphin's Cove fell his length upon the platform. In his agony, for they had shot out his eyes, he clutched at my feet as though he had been an animal; but I drew back, nor would I have lifted a hand to save him if my life had been the hazard.

Now, here were the biters bitten; and you never saw such a turnabout in all your days. One of the officers of the *Vespa* feared death so little, it appeared, that he had drawn a revolver and fired at the wretches who assailed him. Black's fellows now began to roar like bulls; some that we should go astern, others that we should race ahead, but altogether as wild a crew of cowards as sailed the seas that day.

What would have befallen them but for the Captain I cannot tell you; but no sooner had Black realized what was happening than he waved to us to go below; and, catching two of the men, he hurled them down the iron ladder to the engine-room as though they had been children. Taken pell-mell with the others, I found myself presently in the corridor of my cabin, and thither I turned and tried to shut the horrid sights from my eyes. What happened either to us or to the gunboat in the hours that followed I neither cared to know nor to ask. We sank beneath the waves, I remember, and then rose again; I heard

the trampling of feet above my head, and then silence fell, and we appeared to be going ahead, but at no great speed. Another hour and some one knocked upon my door, and, when I answered, the nigger Sambo told me that the Captain waited for me in the saloon.

This was an odd thing to hear, but so it had been often upon the Nameless Ship, where, after some awful scene of madness and of pillage, Black and his officers would sit to their dinners as though the day had been a common one and their own lives as grey as the seas they sailed. Such callousness had ceased to surprise me, and I followed the nigger down the corridor without protest. The saloon itself proved to be a fine domed apartment in the after-part of the vessel, gorgeously decorated with rare woods and gilding, but inoffensive because of the art of it.

Here, upon a round table of mahogany, places were laid for three, and, what with the wealth of the silver and the fine cut-glass and the dishes of solid gold, a man might have fancied himself in a palace and not upon a ship at all.

Black was very pale, but his manner was more suggestive of the old time than it had been from the beginning. Osbart, dangerous upon shore, was here the laughing philosopher, with a jest and a smile at every word; and the first thing he did, upon my sitting down, was to pour out a glass of wine and drink, as he put it, to the Mascot. By that I supposed that he meant me, and I took it up immediately.

"This Mascot has no wings," said I, "or he would have been overboard twelve hours ago. Don't drink my health, Osbart, for that's better ashore."

Black put down his glass and looked at me a little curiously.

"Boy," he said, quite in the old kindly way, "what good or evil destiny put you athwart my hawse, I wonder? That's a question I've asked myself a hundred times. Here's a lad does what the guns of his navies cannot do, and I tell myself that I could have crushed him with my two fingers any day these three years. And here he is — on the *Zero:* because the men won't sail while he's ashore. Is that what your world calls destiny, or what do you make of it?"

"Oh," said I, "precious little — if it's not the old fable of the lion and the mouse. But I doubt if that applies, Captain, for I'd give you up to-morrow if it lay with me. You know it, for I've never been afraid to tell you so; and I say again on this ship, as I said it on the old, I'm here because I must be, but God help you all if ever I get away."

Black shook his shaggy head: in truth he was just like a great lion (and I doubt not as strong), where he sat at the table's head and raised his glass to me. He knew that I spoke the truth, and had always liked me the better for it; but even he could not keep it from me that every hour I was his prisoner was a menace to my very life.

"Ah well," he said jocularly, "there'll be fine

news for your friends when you go ashore — if ever you do go ashore. But I wouldn't think overmuch about it, boy, for that day may be a long while off. And if I were you, I wouldn't be very ready to spout fine things before the crew. They're in no mood to hear tall talk now, and some of them are pretty quick with their side-arms. Just you lie to and bide your time. There's no sense in knocking out good brains against a baulk that hasn't got any brains at all; and that's the truth. You're fast on this ship, and there isn't an admiral afloat who could take you off. Remember it every minute, and don't forget it's Black who's speaking."

He lifted his glass again and swallowed a great draught of wine, as though that were the best end to the argument. None who saw him there would have guessed that the madness of a foul crime had held him in its grip a couple of hours ago, and that he had delivered himself up to the lust of murder and vengeance at the bidding of his pride. Yet such I knew to have been the case; and, because I had never believed that he was other than a madman in those terrible hours, I tried to forget them, and to see him as the memories of old time would have had him to be.

"Oh," said I, "my wits won't go wandering, I'm sure, Captain. But I'll say this, and you must hear me: If there's tall talk on my side, admit to some on yours. You say it will be a long while before

we go ashore, and yet Osbart declares you can't keep at sea from more than ten days. How do you make those ends meet?"

He liked the question about his ship, and began to speak of her almost with the pride of a father in his son. The elegance of the cabin, the rich dishes served to us, the golden wine in the glasses — but, above all, the personal magnetism of the man — led the mind insensibly to confidence and to sympathy. Here was one who should have been a king among men, not an outcast upon the broad of the deep.

"Osbart is readier with the lancet than with good common sense," he began. "I'd sooner trust him with the outside of my body than the inside of my ship. You think you'll tell the world something about the *Zero* some day, just as you told them all about the other. Well, say that Guichard, who built her, has the best engineering brains in Europe, and that the Government which passed him by should be under lock and key. Why was the submarine not bought for France? Why, because of a parcel of lickspittles and pocket-slappers who ought to be in the morgue. He was a straight man, and he wouldn't pay blackmail. There's nothing like this boat afloat and there won't be unless Guichard builds it. She's driven by electricity, with accumulators compared with which Edison's are child's toys. We've electric projectors by which we can see nearly half a mile under water. If the air falls short, we've liquid

oxygen aboard; and we use the gyroscopic compass for safety. I'll tell you more than that. When our batteries go down, we put them back to full strength by fire — and that's Guichard's doing. He's a man in a million, and he's made me Master of the Sea. One nation or ten, pile the fleets of the whole world against me to-morrow, and I'll sink 'em in twenty-four hours. That's Guichard's ship. Let the world know of it, cable your news to London or to Paris, as you please, and I'll snap my fingers at 'em. I tell you, he has made me their master, king of this sea or any other I choose to sail. And that's what the Nameless Ship never was. You know it, for you were on board her when the devil's own sent her down. They'll never do that with Black a second time, boy. By all that's in heaven and hell, I'll make them know my name and never forget it to the end of time.

He brought his fist down heavily on the table, and I could see how much this passion of a monstrous ambition had provoked the outburst. To rule the world from the great ocean; to have the nations at his feet; to set men trembling at his name — had not this been the secret of his wonderful life? Remember that his riches were fabulous, his resources unfathomed. He had friends in every city, hiding places on all the shores; and now this miracle of a ship, which the blind folly of an ignorant Government had put into his power. Who should dare to name the boundary of

such ambitions as his, or to declare them insensate? Not I, who knew him, surely! In truth, both the Doctor and I fell under the spell of his words, and for many minutes after he had spoken there was silence in the cabin. Then we began to talk of the treasure; and I learned, not to my surprise, that the bulk of it was aboard the *Zero*.

"A man with three millions of money who dare not put a foot ashore is a study for a Greek philosopher," the Doctor remarked. I agreed with him, though the jest was not so welcome to Black.

"Name your shore to me," he said, "and I'll set foot on it to-morrow. But why should I stop their play-acting? Here, for as many months as I have fingers, have the fools been hunting Ice Haven for my money. It's been on this ship for five months now, and will stop there another fifty if I am of the mind to let it. When I choose to go different, and have a fancy for the land — why, then I'll ride in like a gentleman. There are new republics I could buy to-morrow — lock, stock, and barrel — if I had the fancy. But I've my work to do afloat first, and that's work to make the world talk. When that's done, I'll begin to tell you about the shore; but not before, not by an hour, not even to see you capering in Paris, Doctor, when, if I didn't know you better, I'd take you for a professor of dancing in a dime academy."

Osbart jibbed at this.

"Oh," says he, "to the devil with the dancing —— "

"And a pretty warm floor for the feet," says the Captain, who knew where the shoe pinched. Osbart was hot in temper by this time, and he asked, almost with passion:

"Do you think I'm afraid —— "

"I'm sure that you are. It's the warship and the drink, Doctor. Man, you see a hull on every skyline."

"There'll be more than one to see before the month has run —— "

"One or twenty, what's that to me? Why, I'll tell you this: I'll be at Hull in ten days' time, and show you what a York ham is like. You shall board the guardship there and tip the Jack who shows you round a sovereign. I doubt not you'll see the dancing all right —— "

We both looked up.

"Hull, Captain? You won't dare to go to Hull — Hull —— "

"Aye, but I will. 'Hell, Hull and Halifax,' don't they say? Well, I'm going to No. 2 for a man I'm wanting badly. Why won't I go there?"

"That's rank madness," says Osbart.

Black roared with laughter.

"What goes so well in the world as rank madness? Answer me that. Would I leave Ned Jolly in the forts at the Humber's mouth when I can take him for the asking? Is it like me to do that? You know it isn't, Osbart. We'll just pick him up in the river,

and then head south for the Bay. I've a mind to see the Mediterranean this time; and when I've the mind to do a thing it's as good as done. You'll be gleg at the prancing in Algiers, Doctor. By thunder, I see your feet shifting."

"And I see a man sailing as near the foot of the scaffold as ever he's likely to sail without catching his neck in a cord. It's stark insanity, Black; you would never have thought of it in the old days."

"I never think of what's gone. The old days are buried. Would you dig 'em up? I was afloat on a good ship then, but this is a better for such a man as me. If it goes under — well, half a dozen go with it.. There were five hundred sank with me last time. Some day we'll drop down in those latitudes and see what the fish are doing with their bones, Osbart. That's a trip which should please you. Aye, man, to count the dead men's skulls on the floor of the sea. Will you come with me?"

He asked it almost fiercely, and the Doctor shrank back from him afraid. These moods, when he delighted to inspire terror, were very characteristic of Black, and he would play with his victim as a cat plays with a mouse. As it chanced, he pushed the matter no farther on this occasion, for the engineer, Dingo, came into the saloon to say that No. 1 was sighted, and we all went up to the platform immediately. Night was falling then, and the northern sky aflame with an arc of light, which stood above

the sea in fan-shape glory of red and blue and the rarest purple. The swell had died down, and the waves lapped upon our bows as though all anger was gone from them. Near by stood a heavy tramp, from whose stumpy, black funnel foul smoke poured. Already she had lowered her boat and sent a foreword to us, but we ran the *Zero* right under her lee when Black came on deck, and immediately began to ship the stores she had carried to us.

Of the nature of these I am unable to tell you. In part, no doubt, they were provisions. I saw bags of biscuit and some fresh meat; they were luxuries in tin cases, and others in wooden boxes. These went aft to the galley, where the hunchback received them. Then I saw that the engine-room hatch forward was open, and that drums (I have learned since that they contained chemicals for our batteries) were passed along. After that I noticed that the batteries themselves were being charged, and that a large number of cells were lifted from one ship to the other: ours being those that had been used, theirs a new supply for us. Altogether, I suppose we stood by the tramp for three hours or more, and when she was gone the northern lights still blazed in the wonderful sky.

But we had already turned our bows southward, and ran with all the speed we could command to the shores of Scotland.

CHAPTER XIII

I SEE THE ENGLISH COAST AGAIN

CAPTAIN BLACK had ever been a solitary man. When I was upon the Nameless Ship, days and even weeks would find him living a life apart in his own cabin, and here upon the *Zero* he was not changed. Sometimes he would dine with us in the saloon; he was often upon deck very early in the morning to see the sun rise; but for the most part of the day we never saw him at all. What he did or what brooding of the spirit kept him from his fellows, I make no pretence to say. The man was not as other men, and could not be judged by the common standards.

Of the rest of the crew I saw much during the ten days which followed the destruction of the *Vespa*. They were a wild lot, but most of them had brains. Black had picked them up in many ports, I learned, and more than one of them had been in prison. The silent Frenchman, whom they called the Leopard, had studied under Guichard and was a first-rate electrician. The great rogue Red Roger was a bully and the whip to keep the idlers going. Like most of his kind he was a coward at heart, and the crew soon discovered it. But he talked big all the time,

and to hear him you would have thought him a match for all the fighting men in the world.

One night, I remember (it would have been about the twelfth day out from Ice Haven), I went up to the platform toward the hour of sunset and found this hulking fellow and the little Frenchman together there. The sea ran rather wild, and every hatch had a red disc outward to show that it must be shut fast by any who used it. The *Zero* herself was running well through the troubled waters and making light of them; in truth, the best part of her lay entirely below the surface; and when I stood upon the platform the waves rose often to the height of my head. There it ended, however, for the wind was behind us, and the seas fell heavily upon the spine of the ship and gave us no more than a dousing of fresh spray.

I had imagined that we must be somewhere near the coast of Scotland by this time, and looking round the horizon, I could make out a dim headland on the starboard quarter. Answering my inquiry, the fellow Red Roger replied, glibly enough, that it was Cape Wrath, which instantly set the little Frenchman chuckling, and he continued to chuckle in a way that irritated the big fellow beyond all bearing.

"Ho," cried Red Roger angrily, "and ain't it Cape Wrath, then? Who says different?"

"Jules, me, I say it. Not Cape Wrath at all;" and then turning to me he exclaimed, "He know nothings about anythings; he joost one great big lie altogether."

Well, the bully was shockingly put out. Clenching his fists, he advanced upon the Frenchman and struck an attitude.

"You son of a blue livered pig, what do you mean by that?"

"*Précisément* — exactly what I say. You are the wind-bag. Then why tell monsieur that it is Cape Wrath when I shall say it is the Holy Island?"

"The Holy Island be jowned. I say it's Cape Wrath, and the man as don't say it with me is going to smell the outside of this," and he thrust his fist toward his adversary's nose, and in another moment would have knocked him down. Then was the Frenchman's opportunity. He had come on deck with a heavy oil-can in his hand, and now he gave it a pinch, and the filthy stuff squirted full into Red Roger's face and went streaming down his neck almost to his boots. Uttering a howl of rage that might have terrified the boldest, the bully sprang upon his enemy and sought to throttle him where he stood. A vain hope. The Leopard deserved his nickname, and ducking with the agility of an animal, he let the red man leap headlong into the sea.

I thought he had gone clean overboard, and was already on my way to the engine-room hatch when a roar of laughter arrested me and I learned the truth. Not only had the Leopard pitched his man into the sea, but he had caught him by the ankle as he did so, and there he held him while the fellow's head was

now in, now out of the water, and his wicked oaths were choked by the waves before they were wholly uttered.

"That Cape Wrath, eh, *mon enfant?* Shall you now say what is the lie? Ho, ho, you speak polite and I dry you before the fire. Is he Cape Wrath — no, by crambo! you say, and that the truth. He not Cape Wrath at all; you have took the medicine, and now you know."

He hauled him up from the sea while he spoke and laid him dripping on the deck. All the fight was clean gone out of Red Roger by this time, and not a little of the dirt. The brine had almost choked him and he was black in the face. What ultimately would have happened to him I cannot tell you. The swell was now rising so rapidly that it was dangerous to stand on the platform at all, and we all made our way below with what speed we could. Then for twenty-eight hours the *Zero* lay deep at the bottom of the North Sea, while the gale raged above and the winds blew tempestuously.

I shall always think this conquest of the deep by a submarine one of the most wonderful things that man has achieved. Here were we, caught suddenly by a hurricane off Holy Island in the North Sea and yet able to drop gently below the waves and to lie there until wind and sea had fallen.

Seated with Osbart in the saloon, for Black did not dine with us that night, we watched the great

projectors throwing their powerful rays upon the shelving banks of sand; we lived in a world upon which the eyes of man had never looked. Great fish were to be seen here and there; monstrous crabs crawling upon their prey; shoals of silver mackerel with the dog-fish darting amidst them and devouring them fearfully. Elsewhere, all would be as still as in some temple of the ocean's mysteries. The water had no motion here; there was no life upon the shelving banks; the rank weeds did not lift to any swell. And here we lay for twenty-eight hours, the air in our cabins made light by the liquid oxygen we carried, and a glorious feeling of security following us to our hiding place.

The gale was quite abated when we rose to the surface at last, to see the flashing lights of the Spurn Head vessel, and to know that we stood almost in the mouth of the Humber. Black had joined Osbart and myself at dinner previously, and we found him in the lightest of moods. His mad adventure was still the mainstay of his conversation, and it could be doubted no longer that he meant to carry it out. With Osbart he was unusually playful; but the Doctor had no lack of courage when the time came, and he answered his taunts quite honestly.

"I'm stark afraid of England, and that's the truth, Black. Set me down in any other country and you'll not find a better man. You'd be the same yourself if you'd stood before an English jury and heard a

red devil with ermine about his neck send you to the scaffold. I've done it, and you're asking me to go in a second time. Well, if it were any other man living, I'd blow his brains out or he should blow mine. But if you go, I go —— "

Black laughed until the glasses rang.

"Why, Doctor," says he, "would you have me hitch you to the Bell buoy and leave you there until we sail out? Come, man, keep up your spirits — or put 'em down if the rum suits you better. I'm going ashore to fetch Ned Jolly out of the Sunk Island Fort here, and you're coming with me. If they take us, turn King's evidence and string the lot of us. But you ought to know me better; you ought to know that when Black has a mind to do a thing, it's half done already. I'm going into that fort to fetch Ned out, and there isn't a ship afloat that could stop me. What's more, I'm going to send Whitehall a telegram when I've done it, so help me thunder."

We stared at him in amazement.

"A telegram, Captain?"

"Why not? The station's on Sunk Island Point. Ned does sentry-go there, and they've trained dogs to help him. You must give these dogs a dose of medicine, Doctor. That's your job, while I fetch out Neddy. If so be he's on sentry-go to-night, it's easier than cracking walnuts. If he's not, why, then I must set my wits to work. But what I want you both to understand is that this is no red work and

that no man's life is to pay forfeit. We'll enjoy ourselves, my lads, and the fun should be fast enough. You may both stand in the tower with me, if you like and see it —— "

He never doubted that we would accept, and draining his glass, he led the way down the long corridor to the tower of which I have told you. I have already said that this was a new Captain Black to me: a man grown more daring in many ways and less prudent in some. His talk of a telegram, for instance, proved to me that he no longer doubted that his escape was known in London. I saw in him a gambler staking his all upon the throw, and I understood that even his courage might not keep him many weeks upon the seas. And yet I have often thought how premature that judgment really was and how little the world knew of him.

The conning-tower of the *Zero* is a wonderful tribute to the skill of the famous French engineer Guichard. There are some of the most beautiful instruments of navigation that even modern science has constructed. All the work of the ship can be done from the tower; the discharging of her fire torpedoes; her rising to the surface or sinking below; her manœuvres, and the control of her engines if need be. Here also is an instrument something like a telephone. You put it to your ear and can distinguish every sound that comes down through the water: the siren of a steamer or a lighthouse, the propellers and paddles of ships,

and even the beat of oars. Another switch turns on the great electric projectors; there are speaking-tubes to communicate with the crew; and, by no means less remarkable, a knob beneath a glass case which, should danger threaten the *Zero* in the depths, instantly releases a great weight from her bottom, and sends her to the surface as though she were a cork.

These instruments I came to know more intimately as the days went on; but I confess to thinking less of them than of ourselves when we followed Black to the tower and he shut the doors of steel behind us. It was now about nine o'clock on a May evening, and we stood some five miles from the Spurn Head light-ship. A peaceful sea showed us countless herring boats, which I did not doubt had come out of Grimsby; and they were a pretty enough spectacle, riding like so many dream ships against the azure sky. No boat, however, lay nearer to us than one mile, and there was little danger of our being observed, even though we rested on the surface of the water, as we continued to do for some time.

Suddenly, and without any warning, Black touched a bell before h m, and the *Zero* sank rapidly and then began to forge ahead, but so deep down that I did not doubt she was wholly submerged. When we had gone on in this way for nearly an hour, the signal to rise was rung upon the bells, and we came up slowly to the surface and there lay with our platform just above the waves and our propellers hardly turning.

We were then close to the shore by Sunk Island, and the batteries at the Humber's mouth frowned upon us forbiddingly. I could see the black shape of a small fort which lay, perhaps, the third of a mile away upon our starboard bow, and it was evident that we must run the gauntlet of the guns if we would make it, as Black's intention appeared to be. This did not daunt our Captain one whit. He was in a jester's mood to-night, and I do believe he would have gone on if all the British warships afloat had been anchored in the estuary behind him. Not so Osbart, who had been afraid from the beginning and was now white with terror at the sight of the English shore.

"There's not a man alive that's worth a game like this, Black," he cried passionately, indicating the batteries and the black mouths of the guns which threatened us. He might as well have addressed himself to the granite of the forts.

"Why," says the Captain with imperturbable good humour, "you're about a month after the fair, Osbart. You should have said all this before I set out for the Isle of Wight to fetch out a certain doctor friend of mine they'd clapped in a madhouse there. Poor old Ned Jolly wants a better advocate, I'm thinking. There isn't a cleverer gunner in the British Navy, and here he is stuck on sentry-go in a bit of a fort not five miles from hell as the crow flies. Would I leave Ned to the vultures — no, by thunder, not if

there were five hundred in yon mouse-trap with him. He was as good a man as ever served me, afloat or ashore, and he's coming this trip if I have to fire the town to get him out. Now, stand by and hold your tongue. I'll hear the rest of it to-morrow."

His tone had become domineering, and when it was that, there were few who had the nerve to contradict Black. I saw that both the daring and the humour of the situation had gripped him, and that nothing short of a miracle would break the spell. He was going to the fort to get out an old comrade of the famous days, and he did not reckon the risks of the venture. When next he spoke it was to ask us if we could make out a sentry on the granite wall before us, and whether it were a bugle or a ship's siren he heard in the fairway. This question I answered, telling him that a bugle had sounded ashore, and that there was a sentry before the fort.

"Is he a little man with a big top-knot — can you make out that much?" he asked next.

I told him that it was impossible.

"Ah," says he, "then we must see for ourselves." And again he touched the gong and we glided onward, creeping up in the darkness until we were not fifty yards from the fort, and it seemed to me in instant danger of discovery.

"Now," said the Captain, "to give old Ned the tune he'll like best." With that he touched a lever and instantly a siren began to blow weirdly over the

waters, while, as it was still blowing, the *Zero* sank gently beneath the waves and the sounds died away in a long wail as of a man in his death agony. It was the very signal I had heard across the sea when Jack-o'-Lantern and his fellows fled from Dolphin's Cove. But, I confess, I heard it now with very different feelings, believing that it must be answered instantly by the guns of the fort, and that our discovery would be but a matter of moments.

I have told you of an instrument in the conning-tower by which all sounds from the sea, whether above or below, were carried to our ears whatever the depth at which we lay. Black had picked up one of these receivers directly we sank, and he motioned to me to take another. No sooner had I put it to my ears than I heard a sound of men talking excitedly above us, then of the tramping of feet and of some one halloaing as though to a boat which was approaching the fort. After this there was silence a little while, and upon this the splashing of oars and a new interchange of questions and answers as though from the ship to the fort and back again. For me it had no meaning, but Black read it clearly enough, and he chuckled while he interpreted it.

"That's the medical inspection boat hailing them, Doctor," he cried, looking over his shoulder at Osbart while he spoke. "I guess they've sighted us and have come along to give us their pills. That's your job, my boy, and don't let 'em queer your pitch. Why,

man, there won't be a front seat in any graveyard in Yorkshire if this goes on. And you sit there like a clucking hen and not half so handsome."

Osbart answered not a word, and, chuckling still, Black fell to business. We rose slowly from the depths and lay now in the very shadow of the fort. High above us a searchlight was working, and a vast arc of its golden light shone far upon the still waters. We could see the medical inspection launch very plainly, and we had no difficulty in seeing that she was going down river upon an errand which did not concern us. On the rampart of the fort itself there stood three men, who were gazing out over the river in a vain endeavour to discover the mysterious siren which had warned them. I imagined that one of them would be Black's old comrade, Ned Kelly, but which one or by what means he was to be brought on board I knew not at all. The danger of our situation was plain enough, and needed no emphasis. Those above had but to fire a gun at us, and we were done for in a flash.

Well, we lay for some minutes without sound or motion in the shadow of the fort, and then a curious think began to happen. It was nothing less than the appearance of a thick fog on the sea round about us — a black, impenetrable mist which floated up, not from the water, but from a large bell-mouthed funnel on the platform of the *Zero*.

This fog was generated chemically, and was one of Guichard's most precious secrets. The effect of it

was to shut everything from our view almost instantly; and when the first black smoke of it had passed, it left a thick haze behind through which all things were seen in vague and distorted shapes. Recalling our adventure at Dolphin's Cove, I remembered the sea-fog which had so puzzled Captain York, and held it to be a mystery no longer. Just as the cuttle-fish protects himself by shooting an ink liquid into the sea, so did we aboard the *Zero* protect ourselves from observation by the swift discharge of this blinding vapour. The haze of it was still upon the water when Black opened the steel hatch of the conning-tower and stepped on deck. An instant later he had hailed the sentry at the fort, and asked him boldly if Ned Kelly were there.

"Who goes?" came the cry. The answer was, "Friend," and then, "Submarine A1 to speak with Sergeant Williams."

I had followed Black to the platform, and I stood there, amazed at his courage and quite spellbound by the effrontery of his actions. I knew that a false word might send us headlong to the bottom of the Humber, and I waited, telling myself that it was incredible such a jest could be played to the end. Then I heard the voice again, speaking through the fog and seeming to come from the very wall of granite which sheltered us.

"I am Sergeant Williams. What orders do you bring?"

"A telegram to London, Sergeant. Have the goodness to write it down."

A contemptuous guffaw followed the intimation, and then the voice asked a question:

"Is this a night manœuvre or what? We've no instruction here. You'll have to show me some authority, I'm thinking — that is, when this d —— d smoke of yours blows over. I never saw such a fog in my life. Are you afire, or what?"

"A bit leaky in the ribs, Sergeant — you'll like the flavour of it by and by. Is that Ned Kelly with you, I wonder? It seems to me I know the cut of his jib — why, yes, it would be Ned, surely, and he'll just be stepping aboard us — eh, Ned, are you coming aboard? It's the old skipper who calls you. Don't you know his voice?"

Well, the effect of it was electrical. I saw a blurred figure come forward to the very edge of the glacis, a voice cried, "Black, by thunder," in a tone which stirred the blood, and then a man came rolling and sliding over the concrete hard and fell plump upon the platform like a sack shot into a wagon. In the same instant a hatchway opened, and Jack-o'-Lantern, catching the fugitive in his arms, dragged him below decks; while Black made a sign to me to return to the conning-tower, and immediately entered it himself.

"Sergeant," says he jauntily, before he closed the steel doors, "I'm very much obliged to you, and my compliments at home. You'll be remembering the

telegram to Whitehall, I don't doubt. Say that Black's afloat, and that some of them will hear of him sooner than they look for. Do you hear me? Then, good night, my boy, and good luck to ye."

His laugh rang out over the waters as the doors went to with a clash, and the *Zero* began to sink. What was in Black's mind, what danger he feared, I did not instantly perceive; but I know that the ship whirled away astern at a tremendous speed, and then swung round as though she would cross the river backward. Hardly had this manœuvre been completed when the water about us began to race and foam as though a tempest were raging beneath, and not on the surface of the sea. I heard a low rumbling sound, as of a submarine explosion; the *Zero* trembled from stem to stern, the very plates in her seemed bursting asunder. And then, as swiftly, calm fell, and we were racing through the dark waters for Spurn Head and the open.

"A near thing," said Black calmly, as he took a six-inch cigar from his pocket and struck a match. "I knew the channel was mined, but I did not think the fool had the wit to fire it. Well, he did his duty, and I'm not the man to quarrel with him. Let's think about supper, for I am sure the Doctor has been licking his lips half an hour or more. Eh, Doctor, do you feel like a glass of the best — could you crack a bottle of champagne with me? Upon my word, man, a better imitation of a parlour ghost I never saw in all my life —— "

He might well have said it, for Osbart was as white as a sheet, and his eyes were almost starting from his head. He had but one thought, that Black had betrayed him, and that the *Zero* was as surely trapped as though the police were already aboard her.

"They'll take you at Dover in the Narrows," he said, almost with savage calm. Black replied by ringing the bell and telling Sambo to serve supper.

"So be it, Doctor," says he, with a laugh. "At Dover, then, we'll look out for your old friends. Let's pledge them a bumper while we have the time, for to-morrow — why, maybe, to-morrow we die."

And with that he led the way to the saloon, and we followed him, as the *Zero* rose to the surface, and all the glory of the moonlit sea was revealed to us.

CHAPTER XIV

WE FIGHT BELOW THE SEA

We were now out upon the North Sea, and it was plain that we were going to attempt the passage of the Straits of Dover and so try to reach the open Atlantic.

Beyond this I had not a notion of Black's plans, nor was Osbart any wiser. As for the crew, they were as wild a set of desperadoes as ever trod a ship's deck. North or south, east or west, it did not matter a rap to them, while debauch was their goal. They had cast in their lot with the greatest dare-devil in the world, and nothing else mattered.

This was all very well, but I had already come to believe that Black was not the man he used to be, and that his old-time prudence had gone down with the Nameless Ship he loved so well. Herein Osbart agreed with me, and it was just because the Doctor understood the Captain's new mood better than most of us that he suffered so many panics upon this voyage.

For my own part I did not doubt that Osbart was wise in his forebodings, and that this wild adventure could not long endure. What my own share in it

must be, whether good or ill, what the future must bring to me, I cared but little, such was the magnetism of the man and his daring. You, who have never known Captain Black, may not follow me in this; but, had you known him, you would have suffered the spell not less surely, and have found in this amazing contest of one man against the whole world a spectacle so engrossing that no peril by sea or land would have dragged you from it.

Remember that we had no port in all the world open to us; that every warship, to whatever nation she belonged, must seize us if she could, or sink us upon sight if capture were not possible. We carried a great hoard of gold, which would have opened untold delights to every man aboard could we have found a haven ashore.

But that gold was now so much dross to us, of less worth than the weed of the sea or the pebbles of the beach. No merry smacksman in a fishing-boat was as poor as we; the very beggars at the church doors might have despised us.

And yet, I say, Black was not daunted, and the jester's mood still sat lightly upon him. Here in the North Sea, with British warships upon one hand and German upon the other, he played a boy's part and delighted in it. Well do I remember how, that very night, when we had left the Humber, he came suddenly upon a fishing-fleet silhouetted against the azure horizon, and ran the *Zero* in among them and

began his capers there. Such a scene, played in the bright moonlight, had never been known in the North Sea before, and never will be again. Here were we, risen up suddenly from the depths amongst these poor fellows, who surely must have thought we were the devil. And there was Black scattering gold upon their decks by handfuls. The night must be far distant when those fine fellows out of Grimsby will be able to tell of another hour as lucky.

That was a picture which will not readily pass from my mind. I see again the black trawlers, bold and sharp against the starlit sky; the wide waters with the moonbeams rippling upon them; I hear Black's merry laugh as he paced the platform and hailed this ship and that, asking of their welfare, and then flinging his gold upon their decks. Here and there a coin would go flashing into the water, and gleam an instant there; but Black ever had a contempt for money, and I do believe he would have flung diamonds into the sea as readily. When the jest was done, he fell to talking earnestly to Jack-o'-Lantern, who worshipped his very footsteps, and I could see that the pair of them were not a little concerned at the appearance upon the northern horizon of a ship which had the aspect of a cruiser. Black, however, gave no orders, and we continued to lie upon the surface, while the distant vessel gradually drew away to the eastward, and even the Doctor forgot to be afraid.

Osbart had become his old self again after we had left the Humber, and I had quite a long chat with him as we smoked a pipe together before turning in. There for the first time I heard that Black had a haven in Spain, and that he was making for it upon this very voyage. But for Ned Jolly and the Captain's unswerving loyalty to all who had befriended him, we should never have entered the North Sea at all; but here we were, and God alone knew if we were ever to get out of it.

"They'll trap us at Dover, if it's anywhere," Osbart said. "I told Black so, but what's the use? You might as well try to move Mont Blanc as to alter his course when he's set upon it. If his insanity to-night doesn't bring his ship ashore — why, then nothing will. They've three submarines at Portsmouth, and the French have half a dozen more at Cherbourg. When I tell him so, he lights a new cigar and offers me a match! Good God! and we might be living like kings ashore if he'd make for South America, as I want him to. There are a dozen cities there which would take such a man, and glad to have him. And what's he say to it — why, that Paris is the only place fit to live in, and that the others are towns for hogs."

I ventured to suggest that if the danger in the English Channel were all he feared it to be, then Black's partiality for the French capital really did not matter. But Osbart would not hear of that —

his faith in the great skipper was sound enough at heart and led him to an eternal hope even in the face of inevitable disaster.

"Oh," he said dryly, "he may find a door — he's just the man, even if the devil were on the other side of the wall. You know that as well as I. The ship which takes Black is going to be the Glory Boat, and somebody pulling like Satan at her tiller. All the same, I wish we were out of the Channel; and so do you, my boy, for all your Quaker's face. Why, Strong, you'd no more give him up than sell your own father to the Cherokee Indians. I know it — and so do you."

I evaded the question, as well I might, and we fell to talking of other matters, but chiefly of the great ship with which Black had ruled the seas before the ironclads of the nations hunted him down. Those were amazing days, but Osbart seemed to think that if the *Zero* once made the ocean, the old kingship would be taken up, and our skipper rule the Atlantic as he had ruled it when first I knew him. And so we were back again at the starting point. Should we be trapped off Dover, or should we not? It was plain that time alone could answer that question, and answered it was dramatically enough, as you shall now learn.

We travelled slowly down the North Sea, standing outside the roads of Yarmouth, and seeing Lowestoft and Southwold but as a cluster of lights upon a far

horizon. Margate we passed in the daytime, and I could just discern the cliffs of the North Foreland as we set a course toward the French coast, and so lost the English shore altogether. So far there had seemingly been very little prudence in the manner of our voyage. We kept the *Zero* on the surface, and the weather being abnormally warm and sunny, the best part of our days were spent upon the platform, where we basked, while the crew lifted their wild chanteys or gambled to an accompaniment of frightful oaths and often of blows.

Black passed his time chiefly in his cabin, where, as Osbart told me, he occupied himself with a wonderful collection of coins he had purchased at Christie's just before he bought the *Zero*. Sometimes at night, when the hither sea was free of ships, we would have a little concert, and the great rogue, Red Roger, would sing "Down Among the Dead Men," or the Frenchman they called the "Leopard" would bring up his guitar and give us haunting lullabies from the Basque provinces; while once, I remember, Osbart himself sang "Alice, Where Art Thou?" in a fine tenor voice which held the men spellbound. This was not a little remarkable, for there was not a man among them who would not have murdered his own brother for a look; and yet here they were shedding crocodile's tears at a little sentimental music and ready to die for the home, sweet home, which none of them might hope to see again.

All this was well enough, but it gave place to a different order of things when we sighted the Goodwin light, and from that moment a real and vital anxiety took the place of a happy indifference.

Black would be often on deck now, judging every ship upon the horizon and careful to be detected by none if it could be helped. Our course carried us almost as far south as Cape Grisnez, and this being out of the track of steamers, either from London or the German ports, we were able to "keep our heads above water," as Osbart put it, and we rarely dived but upon an urgent necessity. So simple did it all appear, that I thought our escape as good as made, when, without any warning whatever, at a quarter to twelve o'clock on the third day after we left the Humber, I heard the alarm bells ringing all over the ship, and instantly knew that the hour of crisis was at hand.

I say it was a quarter to twelve o'clock. I had left Osbart and the Captain in the saloon but ten minutes earlier, and was still but half undressed when the alarm rang out. Running down the corridor, and dragging on my pea-jacket as I went, I tried to gain the platform by the iron ladder amidships; but I found the hatch tight down, and the red lamp, indicating danger, shining clear below it. Already the ship was full of that heavy air which accompanied a descent to the depths, and I could hear the water hissing in the tanks which sank her. I knew that we

must have gone down with unusual rapidity; and when I met Jack-o'-Lantern at the ladder's foot he told me in a breath that we had run slap upon a fleet of submarines not five miles from Cape Grisnez, and that God Almighty alone could keep us out of their clutches.

"The Captain's in the tower," he said; "he'll be expecting you there, sir."

"And Doctor Osbart?" I asked him.

"Oh," says he, "the Doctor's right all through, sir, when his headlights aren't set on the English shore — you'll find him with the Captain, sir ——"

I waited for no more, but ran along the passage; and hammering upon the lower hatch, by which you enter the conning-tower from the hold of the ship, gained admittance immediately and climbed to Black's side. Jack-o'-Lantern had spoken of the danger with such emphasis that I quite expected to find the Captain in a bad way and Osbart no better; but, when they invited me to come up, a cooler pair of men could not have been found afloat. For the matter of that, Black himself had just offered Osbart one of his "six-inch" torpedoes, as we called the famous cigars, and the Doctor was in the very act of striking a light as I came in. So I was quite unprepared for the spectacle my eyes beheld when I looked out through the glass of the tower, and discovered all the water turned to gold, as though a thousand lamps shone out at the bottom

of the sea. Such a thing I do believe no man had ever seen since the beginning of the world, and I could but stand and gaze spellbound, while Black watched me curiously with the vain eyes of a man who knows his mastery.

"What is it, Captain?" I asked, finding my tongue at last. "What are we doing, and what do those lights mean?" He answered me immediately, pleased, I think, to speak of the *Zero*.

"Why, boy," says he, "this is a little bit of a party we're giving to the fishes, and those are the lamps to show our friends the way. Keep your weather eye open and you'll see more things than your philosophy ever dreamed of — and see 'em inside five minutes. Yonder, I may tell you, is the submarine *Plongeur*, which has come all the way from Cherbourg to pay her respects. There are a couple more behind her, and as many up above to do the honours when we peg out. Now, watch while Black has a word to say to them, for they'll remember it, by ——."

His figure became erect and stern instantly; the eyes flashed fire — I knew that I had found again the Captain Black of the Nameless Ship. As for the Doctor, a frenzy of courage appeared to have come upon him, and he stood like a statue, devouring the scene and consumed by that lust of cruelty which ever had mastered him at such moments. The very ferocity of it set me shuddering. I drew back

and watched the thing, afraid to speak, but fascinated as I had never been in all my life. Imagine the depths of the sea shining with such a glorious iridescence that every drop of water might have been a diamond upon which the sun of day had turned its most precious beams. Say, that down there, upon the very bed of the Channel, that Channel over which you have looked so often from Dover or Folkestone or the southern ports, down there monstrous lamps were creating a fairy scene more beautiful than any of which man had dreamed through the ages. Do this and you will be able to stand with me in the conning-tower of the *Zero* and to witness that fearful encounter, when Death hovered about our ship and the lives of all hung upon a thread.

Light, I say, was my first impression of that magic moment, and, upon light, a vision of danger so real that my heart seemed to stand still as I realized it. There, right ahead of us, and clear to be seen in the golden water, was the gleaming shape of a submarine, looking for all the world like a gigantic fish of aspect most terrible. In five seconds, or ten, we should plunge into the jaws of this monster, and it would engulf us. No miracle, I thought, could avert that swift catastrophe — and yet, instantly, with the swiftness of light, Black had averted it, and we had shot upward as a stone from a sling, rising above our enemy and sinking as swiftly in ironic challenge. A moment later, and we had swung about to face the

ship again; but this time she was not alone, and another hovered above her. Following Black's glance to the port upon the starboard side. I perceived the third of the French submarines creeping upon us from that quarter, and I said that we were surely doomed. It was at this moment that the great projectors ceased to light the scene, and black darkness enveloped us.

Remember that I knew little hitherto of the genius of that wonderful engineer, Guichard, or of the magic of his ship. I did not know that she could shoot up from the depths with amazing swiftness or sink as rapidly. But now I came to learn that this power was among her qualities, and that upon it Black relied chiefly for his safety. No sooner were our lamps out than we rose to the surface of the Channel, as a swimmer whose breath is failing him. From the blackness of deep waters we passed to the vision of the still sea and of the coastwise lights shining distantly above the white cliffs of France. Ships appeared upon a far horizon and nearer to us, the submarines waiting for their fellows to rise. We had passed, in a sense, from hell to heaven; but I knew that we were but at the beginning of it, and I watched Black's every gesture as he stood immobile at the glass and surveyed the scene with shining eyes.

Of what was he thinking? Of a turn of destiny which would have sent us headlong to death had he but mistimed his acts by a single instant? Or was

this wholly the Black of old time, dauntless before his enemies and relentless when they pursued him? His face seemed to say that the latter was nearer the truth than the former. The lust of battle was upon him. I believe he would not have turned back if all the navies of Europe had been waiting there in the Channel to destroy him.

"Stand by to the tubes!" The order rang out in clarion tones as he took up the speaking-tube and hailed the watch below. I heard a sound of men moving swiftly in the depth of the ship, and perceived in the same moment that the two submarines were coming at us headlong. Black laughed aloud when he saw them, but the Doctor's face had grown ashen in an instant, and he clutched at the brass rail behind him as though to fend off the shock of the inevitable collision.

"Done for, by ——," he cried. The words were hardly uttered when the *Zero* began to race backward away from the ships and straight toward the French shore.

It was the ruse of ten seconds, for she had not gone a hundred yards when she stopped as though a cable held her, and plunging forward once more, she dived under the very bows of the leading submarine and was down at the bottom of the sea before a man could have counted ten.

"Well done, Guichard, well done!" cried the

Captain as the *Zero* touched the soft sand and our projectors, shining out suddenly, made of it a carpet of gold. The Doctor, in his turn, muttered some words I could not understand, but fear had fallen from him as a garment, and his eyes glowed like lamps while he peered through the glass and searched the still waters for the enemy they hid from us.

"Will they follow us below, Captain?" he asked.

Black did not seem to hear him.

"This will be great news for Guichard," says he, as though that thought ran in his head before others; "I must give him a good account of it when we get through to Paris. There isn't a head like Guichard's in all France, so help me Heaven. Did ye see the way she went down, boys — like a diver, and better? And these swine came here to hunt me out. As true as night, they were after Black and his ship. Well, let 'em take her if they can. The carrion, let 'em put their beaks into me if they have the mind to."

He spat upon the floor as though the fury of it had taken possession of him, body and soul; then, peering into the path of the light, he told us what was in his mind.

"Maybe I could show them a clean pair of heels —maybe not. If I run for it and they hold me, there may be warships out of Portsmouth or Frenchmen out of Brest. My word's for here. And now,

God help those that keep under. If you're with me, Doctor, say so and have done with it. I never was one to forbid a man to speak, and I don't begin to-night. Answer plainly, then, shall it be now or to-morrow? You've got a life to lose as well as me. Say what's in your head and I'll listen."

Osbart seemed to hesitate, as well he might have done. This terror of the nether sea sat ill upon him as it sat ill upon me. Sometimes I could have cried aloud for very dread of the prison of steel and all its fearful suggestion. Even Black had need of all his iron nerve.

"Well, man, are you tongue-tied, then — will you have no voice in it?"

Osbart shrugged his shoulders.

"It's in your hands," said he at last; "sink or swim, you are the man to lead us."

"And the lad here — what does he say?"

I knew not how to answer him and yet felt compelled to speak. A fool alone would have uttered a platitude to this crew of desperadoes fighting for their lives in the caverns of the sea.

"In your place," I said at last, "in your place I would fight now. But I should never have been in your place, Captain, and that you know well."

He smiled on me not unkindly, I thought, and then called for a glass of wine all round and gave us a toast.

"To-morrow!" said he; "to those who see to-

morrow!" And he drained the glass to the dregs and bade the negro, whom his bell had summoned, to refill it. Then he asked for the engineer whom they called Dingo, and the two conferred together in low tones for many minutes. When they had done and he took up the sea telephone again, there was not a sound in the tower save that of the deep breathing of three men.

"They're about three hundred yards away upon the starboard quarter," says Black at last; and I knew that by "they" he meant the French boats we had come down to seek. Presently, however, he astonished us by adding, quite calmly: "But there are only two of them now"; and upon that he laughed and rang down an order to the engineer.

Immediately afterward the *Zero* began to creep along the sandbank; she had made some two hundred yards, I suppose, when, all together, we espied one of the French submarines, and knew that she was done for.

No words of mine could tell of my thoughts at this moment or of the emotions which afflicted me. There upon the sand I saw the wrecked submarine lying upon her side with her bows stove in, and I needed no words to tell me that she had collided with one of her fellows and sunk without hope for those she imprisoned. To them the plates of steel were now a ghastly tomb, mocking their cries and bruising the hands which beat upon them. My mind

depicted their agony, and I could not but reflect that we ourselves might suffer just such a fate before many minutes were numbered.

To be sure, a sentiment of self-pity seemed out of place under such circumstances, nor could I expect it to be shared by the others. Black himself stood quite unmoved, regarding the wrecked hull with an indifference which might have been expected from such a temperament. Imagination did not help him to realize the sufferings of the doomed men; his thoughts centred upon his own good luck in finding one antagonist removed from his path. I thought him brutal in the hour of triumph; but he had been that from the beginning, and it was not to be supposed that the night had changed him.

"Caught in their own trap, by the Lord," he cried, pressing his face to the port as though his eyes must devour the awful sight. Osbart, in his turn, began to laugh horribly, and the laughter waxed and waned fearfully in the tower as the ravings of a madman whose hands have touched death. When I begged him to forbear, Black turned upon me savagely:

"Aye, let him laugh," he bellowed, "the lid's off the hell can and the water's in. Would you lie where they lie? Is he to whimper like a woman because the skunks don't know black from white? The sea rot their bones. I wouldn't lift a finger to save one of them if this were the Day of Judgment."

He flung my arm aside with a wild oath and again gave the signal, "Half-speed ahead." Whatever was my pity for the poor fellows in the cabins of the *Plongeur*, it gave place immediately to a new interest when I beheld the other submarines lying, perhaps, a hundred yards from us and prepared, I did not doubt, for instant attack. So quickly did they act that a loud cry from Black bore witness to the cleverness of it. I saw a dark shape in the water, and knew that it was a torpedo. A ripple of foam ran in its wake; the eyes of it were like those of a fish; the sea telephone carried to my ears the drone of its motor as it headed straight for the *Zero*. Then an agony of dread fell upon me. I did not dare to look again, but waited with my eyes shut for the roar of the explosion and the instant of death.

Some one has said that it is necessary to live through such instants as these to know the meaning of life. If that be so, the cup of my philosophy has been filled to overflowing since destiny first sent me to Ice Haven. Time and again have I stood upon the brink of the dark valley to be snatched therefrom by the genius and the courage of the great pirate. And as it had been when the Nameless Ship dominated the ocean, so now. The blow, which should have shivered the *Zero*, never fell. A touch upon her helm, a lightning-like deviation from her course, and the work was done. The torpedo, they

told me, touched the very rim of our periscope. A foot nearer and it would have shivered us to atoms, there in the depths of the English Channel where the coastwise lights had been our beacon.

A laugh from Black told me the truth, and I opened my eyes to see that we had run right between the attacking submarines, and that they now lay exactly abreast of us, so that we could mark the faces of the men in their conning-towers and study the expressions of those who knew that they were warring with us for very life. Of these my memories are vivid. Often in my sleep I see the wild eyes which then encountered my own; the pale faces of the French seamen, and especially the face of a young lad who stood at the lieutenant's side and trembled with an apprehension of death. Poor boy, I learned afterward that his name was Maurice Dalerny, and that he had left a sweetheart behind him at Calais; but I think he knew that he would never see the sun again, and he was but seventeen years old. The others were grown men, but the horrors of the fight were heavy upon them, and a visionary might have said that they were the ghosts of dead seamen risen suddenly from the deep.

All this, I would write, was the apparition of an instant; and when it had passed Black stopped our engines, and we lay for a little while inanimate upon the sands. What manœuvre he contemplated — what was in his mind or how he hoped eventually

to escape from such a trap, I knew no more than the dead; but I could see that he had become strangely excited and Osbart no less. At last, without any warning whatever, he took the speaking-tube in his hands and roared an order which set the very lamps reverberating.

"Stand by to fire the mines!"

Some one answered, "Aye, aye, sir"; and the ship began to move. Our projectors were now throwing great beams of light straight upward to the surface of the sea, and so brilliant were they that all the water might have been aflame. We moved on a cable length, perhaps, and then once more we eased. I saw Black standing as a figure of bronze by the signal bell and realized that we were going about. For an instant silence befell, and then as a rocket fired from a gun we began to tower, upward and upward, while from below there came the boom of a mighty cataclysm which flung me headlong to the floor and struck the *Zero* to her very heart.

The ship shivered and rolled. A whirlpool of waters raced about the glasses of the conning-tower and foamed as though a mighty wave had broken upon us. There was light no longer from the projectors, but black darkness everywhere, the bellowing of men's voices and the roar of our engines. An eternity seemed to pass before I heard a signal-bell ring out and knew that one of those with me

in the tower was still alive. To this there succeeded the idea that a man was laughing in my ears, laughing horribly; and then fearful sounds recurred and recurred until they were as the ravings of a madman in his death agony. When they ceased, it was because I myself had lost all sense of time and place. Stupor fell upon me, to give place to that dim idea of environment and of action which attends awakening. I heard, as a man may hear in his day sleep, the clash of steel doors and the trampling of feet. A bright light flashed in my eyes; I knew that some one lifted me in his arms; the cool air of the night was breathed upon my face. Then I staggered to my feet to find myself upon the platform of the *Zero* with Black by my side.

"Good God, what has happened — where are we?" I asked him wildly.

But he pointed to the waters void of ships, and with a devil's laugh he cried:

"Ask the sea, lad, ask the sea!"

There was no other answer. Far away I beheld the light of Cape Grisnez flashing its mighty beams over the waters of the Channel.

But of our enemies there was no sign whatever, and I knew that the victory was won and that nothing lay between us and the great Atlantic which the pirate had ruled and would rule again.

CHAPTER XV

THE DEATH BEACON

I WAS three days in my cabin after this dread affair. During that time I saw nothing of the Captain, but much of Osbart, who was often at my bed-side, and as full of devil-may-care confidence as I had known him since the beginning.

Our voyage, I learned, was now to carry us to the shores of Spain, where, in a haven which was not named, the men would get some recompense for the hardships they had endured since we quitted Ice Haven. Black, meanwhile, proposed to visit Paris, a city after his own heart. Osbart told me, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world, that Black had set his mind upon buying certain pieces of old Chinese porcelain, come recently to Paris via St. Petersburg. "And," said he, "when Black has a mind to do that, there isn't a Government in Europe which will stop him."

To this I made a commonplace answer. My own hopes that the mad venture would end as it had begun, and that a swift cataclysm would overtake it, were now giving place to the belief that the man who had ruled the seas as never they were ruled

before, would be as surely their master in the *Zero* as ever he had been on the Nameless Ship. And with this belief there came a foreboding gloomy beyond words.

What must my own lot be if Black kept his word and defied the nations? Could I hope that an accident would again be his undoing, as it had undone him once upon the high seas? That was a counsel of despair and not to be thought of. I saw myself, when I thought of it in the silent hours, doomed to this floating prison until the end; cut off from home and friends; lost to the world I had known; the companion of outcasts guilty of nameless infamies. And from this fate Almighty God alone could deliver me.

We were off Ushant on the morning of the third day, and I went up, despite the Doctor's order, to breathe a little of God's fresh air upon the platform. It was a pleasant morning, with a fleck of cloud and a gentle breeze from west by south. I could make out the coast of France upon our port quarter, and a tramp steamer wafting her black smoke toward us as she headed for the English shore. Ahead of us the great waves of the Atlantic rolled majestically through their infinite solitudes; and all the desolation and the beauty of the ocean enchanted my eyes, long accustomed to the gloom of the cabin.

This wonderful scene turned my thoughts natur-

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land can show no such picture as the eyes kind. She is mightier than the mountains and than the valleys. All the jewels mug from the s of the earth cannot match the gems she catches the sun. There is no emerald as green as the t of you wave; no diamond as much the spindrift shakes from her crown when the winds call u and she answers. Aye, love the sea, my lad, d make her your divinity."

I had known him in such a mood before, and it as a delight to listen to him. Sometimes I thought that this was his secret, and that all he had done and all he had planned to do were the fruits of his homage to the mistress he served so faithfully. He flung the gauntlet to man in the name of the sea. No power on earth could keep him from that kingdom to which the ocean had called him.

"Captain," said I, answering him upon a mood of curiosity, "if you love the sea so well, is there no other way of serving her than upon such a ship as this?"

He did not reply to me angrily, as I feared he would, but, still holding my arm, he declared his pride in the *Zero* and her achievement. At the same time he confessed some of those secret thoughts which would have been a revelation to the world if they had been wholly known.

"The *Zero* is my kingdom," he said quietly. "Men fight and sweat to be masters ashore, but I

am master here, as surely as king or emperor. That's Guichard's doing, and the world should know of it. I thought that I must become as other men when the great ship went down — but, lad, it's not to be. Guichard has built me a fortress which no navy that swims is going to break. Give me the wide sea for my horizon, and I care no more for your battleships than for any bird which plays upon the breakers. They shut the gates to me, but I go in and out when I please. The ocean is my empire, and my will shall rule it. Remember it when men speak of Black and his crimes. Tell them that it's born in me to be master upon the sea, and that no law can write it otherwise."

"Then," said I, eager to question him, "you believe that the *Zero* is impregnable?"

"I believe it," he rejoined. "If I had not faith, why should these men follow me? Heaven or hell is nothing to me while I walk these decks and know that I am the master. Day and night are of less account than the waters about me and the wild sea's face. Aye, lad, I have begun to live again since the *Zero* sailed from Brest. It's Guichard's doing — and I will make him the greatest man alive as surely as there is a sky above us."

I forebore to ask him how he hoped to do this when every port was shut against him, and there was not a seaman afloat who would not try to take him, alive or dead. That the Frenchman had built

him a submarine twenty years ahead of her time, I never doubted; but other considerations crowded upon my mind, and chiefly those of the support he must find if he would continue to hold the seas. What if he missed his consorts? How if he were isolated at the heart of the Atlantic? These were vital questions. But, as though they must be answered in irony, what should happen at that very moment but the engineer, Dingo, came up the ladder to say that relief "Number 2" lay upon our port quarter, and that we had better go about to meet her. When I looked over the sea to the point he indicated, I saw the tramp which had been upon our horizon an hour ago, and I understood that she was the consort for which Black waited.

We made the tramp about two o'clock of the afternoon and were grappled to her side while the stores came over. Her crew were mostly unknown to me, but I recognized the skipper for a man I had seen with "Four Eyes" in Black's room in Paris some years gone. The others were just tarry sailors, chiefly Russian, I think, with lascars among them. But whatever they were, they worked willingly enough and loaded us up with incredible rapidity. All kinds of provisions and delicacies came to our holds during the next two hours. There were cases of wine and whiskey, fresh meat and poultry, fine cakes and biscuits and an amazing quantity of rare fruit — all necessary to a ship where the meanest fed as well as

the Captain, and no distinctions of persons were recognized. When the provisions were stowed, the chemicals for our battery were put on board, and these were worth their weight in gold to us, for without them no coracle had been more helpless.

I suppose it would have been nearly eight o'clock at night before the work was done and we were cast loose from "Number 2." Black had spent the time in the chart-room of the tramp, conferring with the skipper; but he was preoccupied when he returned and I had no further talk with him. Osbart, on the other hand, who had also visited the steamer, remained on the platform to talk to me, and he told me very frankly what was in his mind.

"The story's out," he said, without preface, taking me by the arm and beginning to pace the steel deck with the restless step I knew so well; "of course, you didn't expect to hear anything else, but that's the truth. The man was mad when he sent the telegram. Every station is warned from the Nore to 'Frisco. There isn't a warship afloat which won't be looking for him before a week has run. And here he is talking of what he'll do in Paris; my God, he might as well talk of Portland for all the sense of it."

He pulled a London paper out of his pocket and showed me what had been written. Many who read this will remember the excitement and the wonder in England when it was known that Black lived and was afloat again. Fear and incredulity and anger were

reflected in the impassioned articles with which the London papers were filled. Some blamed the Government; others fell to wild appeals for instant action — just as though the Admiralty was not wide awake enough and at its wits' end to boot. Never have I read such a tissue of mad alarm and impotent threat as this journal, which Osbart handed to me, served up for the pleasure of its readers. And I will confess that my heart was aflame with pride both in the man and his ship when I looked over the wide waters and said that he ruled and would rule them still.

"Black had read this, of course?" I observed to Osbart as I returned the screed to him. He admitted that it was so.

"He reads every line written about him — there's vanity behind what he does, though you might be slow to think it. He'll go to Paris and risk his neck just because he wants the world to know he's been there. What's more, if something the skipper of 'Number 2' hinted at is true, Black and every man aboard her will hang as high as Haman in less than a month's time. I wouldn't tell it him for a million sovereigns laid on that deck this very minute. It's rung in my head like a bell ever since I heard it. There'll be no sleep for me to-night, Strong, not if the devil himself closed my eyelids."

"Then it is very serious news, Osbart?"

He clutched my arm and pressed me against the steel taffrail.

"It's life or death to all of us," he cried, his eyes almost starting from his head; "life or death, the open sea or the gibbet. That's what it is, Strong."

"And I am to know nothing of it?"

"You — you who stand as you do to him? There's not a dog in the ship I wouldn't tell before you. Fire burn the paper on which it's written down. I was mad to speak of it at all."

He was greatly troubled, and I confess that his agitation alarmed me not a little. At what danger he hinted, what was the secret he had learned on board the tramp, I could not even hazard; but that it was of grave import no man might doubt. Standing there, with puckered brow and clenched fists, Osbart typified a true figure of the ship. Dante had imagined no such face as his when a searching beam of crimson light fell upon it, and showed the eyes staring into the very soul of the night.

I say that beams of crimson light enveloped us, and you must know of this more intimately.

There had been men working upon the platform while the Doctor and I talked, and I now saw that they opened a pair of iron shutters in the spine of the ship and so disclosed a cavity in which lay the identical launch we chased from Dolphin's Cove. This, truly, was a clever idea. The launch fitted into a cavity in the whale-like back of the *Zero*, and you had but to throw the shutters open and to send her sliding down an iron rail and she was in the water immediately.

When she was launched upon this occasion the men began to occupy themselves with a task which was without any meaning to me at all. First, they put into the boat the sections of what looked very much like a raft. Then they pushed off from the *Zero*, and at a distance of a cable's length, perhaps, they began to fit this raft together, and make of it a great square of steel, which floated buoyantly and must have been some ten feet across. Returning to the ship, they then carried away a large number of electric accumulators, and, having put these on board the raft, they made another journey and loaded the launch with cans of spirits and sacks of coal. This brought it to my memory that the *Zero* was driven by electricity and that her batteries were renewed by fire. My wonder at the cleverness of it all was still with me when a sheet of flame leaped up from the raft and the sea turned blood red as though fire were vomited from its heart.

"Great God!" I cried in my astonishment, "what a sight to see! What a picture, Osbart!'

He heard me indifferently — the secret still obsessed him and he could find little interest for anything else. When he spoke, it was to give the credit of the thing to Guichard — that genius of all we did and all we might hope to do upon the high seas.

"Fire's life to us," he said quietly; "while you are on the *Zero* you will know that man shall live by fire alone. We burn our batteries every week if we

can; but they could run three weeks if we were pressed. Black says he could get across the Atlantic with them; he's mad enough to try it, and God help us if he does. Some day a ship will catch us like this, and that will be the end of the *Zero* and her crew. I've foreseen it from the start. We are helpless when the batteries are out of us. Any third-class cruiser could sink us then."

"How long does it take to finish the work?" I asked him. He said that five or six hours were necessary.

"Five or six hours — and an open sea; not the fairway of ships such as this. We are fools to be playing about in such a place. We shouldn't have been but for Black's sentimentalism. What business had he in the Humber when the treasure was aboard and every hour precious? I say he is not the man he was, and you know it, Strong — none better."

Well, I had my doubts about it; but I would not get to words with him. To me Black was still the great Captain, the master genius of the sea whose like I shall never know; whose match will never be found in the story of the world. Had I doubted it that very night would have answered me triumphantly.

The batteries were out of the ship, I say; the hither sea was aflame with the sheen of the beacon we ourselves had kindled — the "death beacon," as Osbart called it ironically. And this was how things went:

our engines helpless, our hatches off, some of the men at their supper; dinner already prepared in the saloon; when the look-out cried, "Ship on the starboard bow!" and there across the sea I discerned the black hull of a steamer, and told myself in the same instant that the *Zero* was done for, and every man aboard her.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RED FLAME BEARS WITNESS

THERE had been a glow of the northern lights in the heavens and no real darkness at all since about two bells in the first watch. I could see the strange steamer quite clearly, and, for that matter, she was silhouetted against the cloudless sky as a picture in a shadowgraph. At first I thought by her shape that she was one of the British cruisers I had visited at Falmouth not many weeks ago; but presently I changed my mind and said that she would be some foreign warship and most likely German. But whatever she was, her discovery struck the crew of the *Zero* with such terror that men cried aloud as though ropes were already about their necks.

That was a dreadful scene and one I shall never forget. The loud shouting of the men for the Captain to come up to them; the mad running to and fro; the fierce beacon shooting its flames over the rolling waters; the *Zero* helpless in the trough of the sea — all, I say, contributed to a sense of panic and the belief that nothing could save us. As for Osbart, his horrid curses made my blood run cold, and I shrank from him as from some devil whom danger had unchained.

No lost soul could have uttered sounds more unearthly than this madman who had been touched by the finger of doom.

Here was the turnabout, this the disorder and panic of our decks, when Black appeared suddenly at the ladder's head and roared "Stand by!" in a voice which thundered over the waters.

Never have I seen a change so magical. Men, who had been blubbering like children, stiffened themselves and found tongues to cry, "Aye, aye, sir!" Osbart checked the curse upon his lips and waited with shining eyes to hear the Captain's word. Disorder gave place to the method and the silence of duty as though at the mere presence of the man whom all feared. You could have heard a pin drop while Black strode across the platform and raised his glass to espy the stranger.

"What do you make of her, Dingo?"

"She would be a Dutchman or a German, sir, by the cut of her top hamper."

"Nothing more than that, my man?"

"Unless she's a cruiser in her shore clothes, sir."

"Your eyes do you little credit — never believe more than you can see and but half of that. What has Jack-o'-Lantern got to say about it?"

His confidence in the one-eyed man had always been considerable, and I saw that he listened to him now with bent ear and puckered brow. Nor did the hunchback hesitate to speak his mind.

"I think she's German, sir, and no more than she looks."

Black nodded as though pleased.

"You think well, my man — she's the German liner *Borkum*, and she sailed from Hamburg to Cherbourg three days ago."

Well, it was a douche upon the panic, and the men started up at it, grown brave in an instant and contemptuous of "liners." I heard the bully Red Roger cry, "To hell with the black caps!" while as for the little Frenchman, he capered like a girl at a fair. The Doctor alone seemed unrelieved by the plain sense of the discovery. Still muttering, he crossed the platform and faced the Captain squarely.

"If she's a liner, what's she want with us, Captain?"

"She wants the twenty thousand pounds offered for you and me, Doctor, by those who have a fancy to see us dance on nothing."

Osbart stamped his foot.

"It's God's truth, and she'll get it."

And then to the men he said:

"I take you all to witness that this is none of my doing. There's a reward of twenty thousand pounds offered ashore for the ship that takes us. Well, that money is as good as paid. Our batteries are out — you know it. We lie here helpless for any man to strike. I say it's none of my doing. Bear witness all to that."

He made a wild appeal to them, but God alone knows what was in his mind. As for Black, I feared at first that he would strike him down where he stood — but that was not the great Captain's way of dealing with a coward; and presently I saw Osbart begin to tremble and quail as though he stood at a judgment seat and the sentence had been passed upon him. Still trembling and with the Captain's eyes fixed upon his face, he drew back as from a blow; and, never once averting his glance, he went slowly down the ladder to his own room. Then, and then alone, the Captain spoke.

"Yon man's no better for an English prison," says he quietly; "he'll be prescribing sulphur for the devil if he don't mind his ways. Take no heed of him, my lads. The Doctor's well enough when we're in southern latitudes; the rest of ye get your arms and stand by for trouble. I'll make those lousy Germans dance the polka, by thunder!"

He gave a secret order to Dingo and the latter went below. The rest of them, according to the command, appeared on deck presently armed to the teeth and as fine a looking lot of desperadoes as ever I hope to look upon. All carried a late pattern of rifle, and there was not a man among them who had not a couple of magazine pistols in his belt. Obedient to Black's order, they now raised a light hood of steel upon the starboard side of the platform and fixed it in its place with metal straps. Then the cover was

taken from the gun and a shell thrust into its breech.

Observe that we were now in a measure shut in, the steel screen protecting us from any rifle fire upon our starboard side and forbidding us to take any other than a sitting posture. For all that, we had a clear vision of the open sea and of the steamer gradually drawing near to our beacon, which still flamed fiercely and shed a vast aureole as of blood upon the breakers. Reassured for the moment, the men had worked willingly enough; but when the work was done and we had but to wait for the issue, I could see that the Captain's splendid confidence was not shared by his fellows, and that a black despair again had fallen upon them.

Consider how it stood with us.

The batteries out of the *Zero;* the liner bearing down upon us; a great ship against which all our trickery could achieve little; other ships to be expected any hour in such a place. And there were but half-a-dozen men to be pitted perhaps against five hundred, and the latter inspired by the greatest reward ever offered by a Government. Was it reasonable to hope that we could weather such circumstances or dare to think of to-morrow? For myself I confess that I did not believe the *Zero* would be afloat at dawn.

If there were another side to it, Black's demeanour made that possible. I have seen him in many a

dangerous hour, but never one which found him cooler. Disdaining the shelter of the platform, he had gone to the crest of the whale-back deck forward, and there he sat, smoking a great cigar and watching the liner's approach as though it were a common event of the day. When I crept up to him, he suffered me to sit there by his side and even deigned to tell me what he would do.

"Well, my lad," said he, "have you come to tell me we are done for?"

"Oh," said I, "that would be from one who did not know you, Captain."

He liked the compliment and nodded his head.

"We must bring her on a cable's length presently," he ran on; "the fire should not stand between us, I'm thinking. Don't you see, my lad, that they'll try to sink the batteries if they are clever. That's been in my mind since first I clapped my eyes on them. We must keep the lubbers off the batteries."

"But," cried I, "your engines are not working."

He laughed loudly.

"The Doctor's been at you," he said, with sly pleasure; "do you think I would sail a ship which must lie flat like a jelly-fish for any wave to swallow? We've a reserve, of course, enough to manœuvre her — no more."

"Then," said I, my heart beating rapidly at the thought, "you could sink if you choose, Captain?

Osbart was telling a fool's tale when he said you were helpless."

"A fool's tale, my lad, for I'm never a man to be found helpless. What's truth is that we can't go below until the great battery is aboard. As well might a shark run away from his fins. We'll fight the cabbage-eating swine afloat and leave it at that. You tell me to-morrow whether Black was helpless."

I made no answer, for I could see that some movement on the liner's part had arrested his attention; and now, regardless of the place, he stood up and began to peer into the night. Ten seconds passed, perhaps, and found him motionless. Then he called to Jack-o'-Lantern and gave him an order.

"Dead slow below. Let every man stand by when the ship brings to. Ned will be at the gun. Let him fire at the word 'three.' You understand me, Jack ——"

"Yes, Captain. And the men ——"

"They'll keep at their stations and wait for the boat to come off. Let the Frenchman stand by the tube. It may be a case of sink or swim, Jack. I'll leave it to the Germans to begin."

He climbed back to the platform and I followed him with what skill I could. The steel doors of the conning-tower were open, and he did not shut them when he went in, so I followed him there, and to my surprise found Osbart, quite cool and collected, and carrying a heavy revolver in his hand. We were

hardly down the ladder when the Frenchman cried to us from above that the liner was signalling to us — and this proved to be the case. Even I, who was no trained sailor, could read the message of her flashing lanterns.

"What are they saying?" the Doctor asked me quite in the old way. I told him, as well as I could, that they were asking us our name.

"Then they don't know the truth," says he; but it was hardly spoken when there came a rattle of rifle bullets, and they struck upon our hood of steel as a hail which left fire in its train.

"A pretty blundering lot," cries the Captain grimly; but he gave no other order, and presently I saw the great ship's lantern flashing again, and I read the second message. It offered us five minutes to decide whether we would surrender as we were or take the consequences. Evidently their captain thought that he had us stricken and helpless. There could be no other excuse for his folly.

"A gem of a man," says Black, falling to an Irish manner of speaking; but he gave no word of command, and so there we lay in the trough of the sea, with the great ship looming above us like a fortress, and the beacon blazing at our backs, and the swell ruddy as with a floor of blood. Never would a man ashore understand the moment of it or what the crew of the *Zero* must have lived through in those instants of waiting.

Had they any kind of gun or had they not? There are German liners that sail the seas in cruiser's trim and are little less serviceable than warships. Of the *Borkum* I myself knew nothing, either of her history or her armament; but it was plain that the men had some kind of a story about her, and that what was in my mind was in theirs also. If the great ship carried any kind of machine-gun, we were done for beyond any hope whatever. If she did not carry a gun, we might outwit her, poor as the prospect seemed. So the affair went in my manner of reckoning, and thus it was that I could hear my own heart beating as I stood at the glass of the conning-tower and looked out over the blood-red sea. The question of the gun stood paramount. I waited for the thunder of its report as for a judgment from Heaven upon the pirates. The instants of delay were an agony to suffer.

Well, no shot was fired, and, at that, courage seemed to come upon the men as a freshet. Black himself had not turned a hair from the beginning, and none was quicker than he to perceive the significance of the liner's silence. Plainly, he had staked all upon the hazard of her armament, and fortune rewarded him. As a man triumphant he turned to Jack-o'-Lantern, and bade him make an answer to the signal. Then through a monstrous megaphone, one of Guichard's designing, there went across the sea a word of defiance which might have set even our own men shuddering.

"Ahoy, there, you on the *Borkum!* I give you ten minutes to put twenty thousand pounds on this ship. Move a cable's length from where you are, and I'll blow you to hell, by the Lord above me! Do you hear me? Then put out a boat before I do you a mischief."

Jack shouted the order, and it was taken up instantly by another voice—that of the Frenchman, who spoke German very well, and translated for the benefit of the captain of the *Borkum* in case he had no English. When the message was delivered there was a little interval of waiting, and upon that an answer from the *Borkum's* lanterns. She told us that she understood, and that a boat was being put over immediately.

Now, you will say that this was a rejoinder which a fool might have understood, and, to be sure, there could have been none so foolish aboard the *Zero* that he was deceived by it. Had the Germans temporized with us, or made a show of argument, we might have been led into a trap; but such immediate acquiescence could only mean that they judged us to be at the mercy of any ship which happened upon us, and were determined, whatever the risk, to enjoy the reward and the *réclame* which would attend the capture of the great pirate. So they put over a boat without any loss of time whatever, and, rowing straight toward us, it seemed that they would be aboard us almost before we understood what they were at. It was then that

Black spoke for the second time since the beginning of it.

"Cover your men!" he cried to our fellows; and then in a tremendous voice. "At them, my lads!"

The rifles cracked on the still air; a loom of smoke drifted above us; loud cries of rage and agony rang out. So sudden was it that my first thought would have it that the Germans had fired at us and not we at the Germans. As swiftly I realized Black's prescience and the wonder of his judgment. The ship's boat lay drifting at our very gunwale; we pulled it in with a long boat-hook, and flashing one of the big lamps upon it, we saw twenty men there, armed with pistols every one, and some with rifles as well. These had come in answer to our challenge, and had they boarded us, no man on the *Zero* would have lived to tell the tale.

"So that's their twenty thousand pounds?" said Black grimly, while the lantern shone upon the living and the dead; "that's the German hog's game, is it? So help me Heaven, I'll teach him something before this night's done."

And then, in a very whirlwind of passion, he roared, "No. 1 with the gun — you there, Jack, give 'em three minutes to bring the money. Do you hear me, lad?"

Jack-o'-Lantern cried, "Aye, aye, sir!" and once more the howling megaphone wafted its defiant message over the waters. If my thoughts could be

turned aside, even for an instant, from the stress and strife of combat, it was that they might dwell upon the disparity of the antagonists; and I would look, now at the great ship frowning upon us like a citadel of the ocean, then at the *Zero* as she lay half submerged by the rolling seas. What a contrast it was; what an unbelievable encounter. And that we should have endured it and be still afloat, aye, and more than afloat, defiant and resolute. This, I say, might have been the trend of my thoughts had not they been called, now to this, now to that, scene of the turgid drama, which spoke of death upon the one hand, and of vigorous and all active life upon the other. So the contrasts of it became less to me than the realities, and my eyes were drawn at one glance to the great ship, at the next to the boat which spoke so eloquently of treachery. There were men worming in the agony of wounds so near to me that an outstretched hand could have touched them. There were the stark figures of those who had paid the price — and supreme above all stood the massive figure of the pirate, triumphant as David in the hour of his victory.

We had sent down the men in the boat (who came to take us alive or dead), and the next move lay with the German steamer. If I had been tempted to think that all which happened hitherto had been a medley of chance, a play of circumstance without order or method upon Black's part, a new event put that idea from my mind and left me amazed at his prescience.

For now the great beacon went out suddenly, and the sea, which had shone blood-red, became but a sheen of rolling green waves which the struggling moonbeams disclosed capriciously. In a twinkling the *Zero* was hidden from her giant enemy. I heard the clang of the steel doors which covered the launch, and knew that men were launching her to bring the batteries on board. The work was hardly begun when a searchlight flashed out upon the far horizon, and with a startled cry Osbart declared that a warship was upon us.

"It's the *Invincible* out of Plymouth, by all that's hellish," said he. Black did not answer him immediately, but I knew that he was moved. The wide beam of light, winging over the dark waters, must have been a sudden vision of victory to the men on the German steamer. They had us now for a certainty — so much they must have said. Vain had been our impudent boasting that they should pay us twenty thousand pounds — the very sum offered by the Government for Black's capture. Let them stand for an hour, and that would be the end of it. We, in turn, must have begun to think of the clock already. Could we get our engines going before we came within range of the warship's guns? If we could not, God help us.

Of course, I thought that all the fighting was over now. The new turn of events must be too much even for Black's iron will. When I heard him cry

"No. 2 with the gun," I could not believe my ears. Sitting there by the glass of the conning-tower, I watched the distant searchlight and tried to measure the speed of its approach. Would the cruiser be in time or should we cheat her even yet? The answer came from the *Zero* herself, for even as I dwelt upon the chances our own gun boomed out and the hither sea became as a sheet of livid flame.

I have seen many a great gun fired in my time but never such a gun as that. The world knows something about it by this time, and has been taught that Guichard fired no shot or shell as we understand it, but that his cannon was charged with chemicals, sending an *obus* which exploded with a force defying all theories, and when it had exploded, fired what the explosion itself had spared. I tell you it seemed that the *Borkum* was afire from her fo'c'sle to her funnel when the shot had gone home. Vast sheets of flame, multi-coloured, here a deep crimson, there a staring yellow, now wonderfully golden, anon of the deepest violet, this flame, I say, leaped up above the ship to die away as instantly in the blackest darkness. Hardly had the flash of it expired when a new order was roared from our megaphone. The ransom! Would they pay it? Black gave them five minutes.

I sat in the conning-tower and hid the scene from my eyes. The minutes were ages of intolerable suspense. Inch by inch the warship crept up to

us. I heard Osbart raving, and then the complaints of the men. We were done for surely — and done for because the Man of Iron clung tenaciously to his purpose and would not be turned a hair's-breadth from it. There he stood, dominant above the peril of the night. From the sea there came the horrid cries of men burned by fire; wails and shrieks of pain and fear. The *Borkum*, her valves emitting dense clouds of steam, drifted upon the tide and anon began to forge ahead slowly. Our own men, working until the sweat poured off them like rain, were trying to get the batteries in — the distant warship loomed big upon our horizon, and the light from her mighty lantern began to envelop us as with a vast golden cloak dropped from the heavens. Such a scene must live for ever in my memory. The thunder of the shots will wake me from my sleep until the last of my days.

The race! My God, if we were to lose it! It mattered nothing to us if the German went free. To Black it mattered so much that his pride would have gone astoop many a day had she escaped him. Sooner than that, I believe he would have delivered himself a prisoner upon the warship's decks. For that, he fired a second shot at the very moment the *Borkum* began to steam away from us, and for the second time he enveloped her decks in the deadly flame. I saw the gun flash out; I saw the fire leaping as a spray of molten metal from stem to stern of the unhappy vessel. Impotently in the far distance the

stranger fired a great gun and signalled her presence. Shrieks and prayers for mercy fell upon our ears from the drifting steamer, whose engines were now stopped. A second boat was lowered. It drew near to us, and as it came the light of our lanterns glittered upon the gold and jewels with which it was laden. And then I knew that the Indomitable Will had prevailed once more and that he who would be king had again proclaimed his kingship.

A wild cheer floated over the terrible sea. Again and again it was repeated as a very voice of devils from the depths of the black waters. I heard the clanging of steel doors; the ringing of bells. Then with a fierce rush onward, we headed straight for the coming warship, drew near to her defiantly, and plunged beneath her very bows to the marrow of the ocean.

The *Zero* had escaped her enemies, who had paid her twenty thousand pounds that they might go free.

CHAPTER XVII

CAROUSAL

It had been Black's way in the old time to reward his crew when they had served him well; just as in the days of Nelson a tot of rum was given the tarry sailor who had done a hard day's work.

This practice was not departed from upon the *Zero;* and no sooner had the ship escaped her enemies than a scene of carousal defying all description celebrated her victory. Champagne now ran like water; there was no distinction between fo'c'sle or saloon; but all the hands crowding together, Black gave them the first of the toasts, and they drank in bumpers drained to the dregs.

Thereafter a feast was spread in the chief cabin, and all sat down to it. We were still deep below the seas, and never was such a picture of lights, and silver, and the savage faces of exultant men, while the black waters shone through the ports and the fish stared at us with wondering eyes.

Here you saw a strange sight — black hands thrust into dishes of rare china; vast mouths, whose teeth awry devoured the hectic fruit of millionaires — bare chests and arms tattooed; a fierce, godless com-

pany with the great Captain leading them to debauch and the Doctor not a whit behind him. Through the long night they ate and drank and sang their foul songs — and while they sang, I shrank from them to my bunk and wondered anew at the destiny which had sent me among them.

Whither did the voyage carry us, and to what haven? I had asked myself this many times since we left Greenland, but never did it seem more difficult to find an answer. Sooner or later the Governments of the civilized world would win their victory, and this ship and all aboard her be delivered up to justice. Meanwhile, these scenes of death and debauch must be lived through without complaint. I knew that my life depended upon compliance, and, even at that, was but the plaything of an hour. Let a fit of passion fall upon this crew and they would kill me as a butcher kills a sheep.

It had been nearly midnight, I suppose, when the wicked affair of the carousal began, and dawn found it still raging. Try as I would, I could not shut the horrid songs and oaths from my ears; and when they died away at last in drunken moanings or trickling laughter, the fetid atmosphere of the cabin forbade me to sleep. Coming to the truth amid a maze of wild dreams, I started up in my bunk to remember that the ship still lay deep beneath the sea, and that those who should have brought her up were besotted in drink and beyond all hope of reason. And this,

I think, gave me as great a fright as I can remember; so that I put on my clothes anyhow, and indifferent to the chances of a drunken brawl, went out to the corridor and so to the cabin.

Here there was a sight to stir the soul of any man that had a glimmer of decency about him. All the fine glass upon the table had been smashed to atoms. I saw costly porcelain chipped and starred as though it had been kitchen stuff; the candles stood awry, and the electric bulbs were broken; plates and silver were all aheap, and the cloth beneath them stained blood-red by the wine they had spilled. As for the men themselves, I was glad to find that Black was not among them; but the engineer, Dingo, lay stark insensible at the foot of the table, where the hulk of a man, Red Roger, had fallen atop of him, and there rested with his arms spread out and his face gone purple. Of the others, I could discern but Ned Jolly and a fellow who served as steward — but the nigger Sambo was asleep in the little pantry below the saloon, and from the engine-hold amidships there came a sound of groans and crying just as though a woman had been there and piped feebly for a man's help.

I shut the cabin door softly, and, following the corridor, came at last to the ladder by which you reach the engine-room. Lights burned here, but seemed to be at their last gasp. A fitful current waxed and waned upon the wires; the lamps were now aglow,

now almost gone, and yet they permitted me to take in the scene below at a glance, and to recognize Jack-o'-Lantern and the Frenchman they called the Leopard. The latter was poised upon the rail of the dynamo; he had a long sheath-knife in his hand, and he dared the other to come near him. Plainly he was mad with drink and hysterical as any woman; while, in his turn, the one-eyed man could hardly stand straight upon his legs. Like the other he was armed; but his weapon was a great bar of iron he had snatched up from the tool rack in the corner, and he waved it above his head giddily and with a want of control at which a child might have laughed.

"Come out, you French devil," he was saying; "come out of that. Would you send the whole ship to hell, ye frog-eating mouse-trap? Come out of it, I say, or, by thunder, I'll brain ye!"

Upon which he aimed a blow at his adversary which would have knocked the brains from an iron ox. I heard the bar crash upon the steel rail of the dynamo, and I cried aloud for fear of the blow. A foot further and it would have shivered the machinery upon which the safety of every man aboard the *Zero* depended.

"Below," I cried; and then, "have a care, Jack, for God's sake," and at this he turned a besotted eye upon me and watched me for a full minute as a beast of prey watches its quarry.

"Who called?" he asked at last, by which I knew

that he had hardly recognized me, and that all his poor wit was set upon this task of saving the ship. When I made myself known to him in any words I could find, he listened with bent ear, but a brain which had no clear perception of the truth.

"It's this lousy Frenchman," he muttered at last, "gone raving mad, he have, and all amuck like a dirty nigger. He'll do us in, so help me thunder. Now you run away and bring the Captain, that's what you do, young gentleman. And no time to waste neither, if you don't want salt water for breakfast."

Well, he had hardly said it when the Frenchman was atop of him. I saw the sheath-knife flash twice, and heard a deep groan from the man who had saved my own life in the cabin of the *Celsis;* then I went headlong down the ladder, and springing at the Leopard, I caught his neck in both my hands and throttled him from his prey. It was at the very moment when the lights went out suddenly and black darkness came upon us.

I had dragged the fellow clear of Jack-o'-Lantern and was that much to the good. They had called him the Leopard with some sense, for never was there a more cat-like creature. I am strong, and can always take good care of myself in a common fray — gloves or singlestick, or a bout at wrestling, I care not what it may be; but this fellow was altogether too quick for me. Ducking his head so that his forehead almost

touched the ground, he made a sudden move backward, and I had lost him. Then I heard the slash of his knife upon the steel plate of the ship's side, and I knew that he struck wildly in the hope of a lucky hit which should leave him master of the cabin. Here fortune favoured me, for while I could almost feel the smash of the blow, the knife did not touch me, and I had swarmed up the ladder and raced toward Black's room before the man knew that I had gone at all.

Black's private cabin was forbidden ground to us all, and this was the first time I had knocked upon the door of it. A larger cabin than the other, it lay upon the starboard side of the conning-tower, and was entered through an arched door of steel. Upon this I knocked loudly, crying, "Captain, Captain," while I did so — but not a sound within could I hear, nor did any voice answer me. Meanwhile, the air in the corridor had become heavy and foul, to the point of suffocation. I drew a deep breath with the sense that I might draw no other. There was that drumming in my ears which is the herald of suffocation; and believing that all within the *Zero* were certainly doomed, I raised my voice in a last great cry, and beat upon the door with the fury of a madman.

I shall not dwell further upon the intolerable minutes of delay which I suffered in the darkness as I stood at Black's door and told myself that I had not many minutes to live. When at last a bright light

flashed upon my face, my senses were half gone, and it was some little time before I understood that the Captain himself opened to me and that he carried an electric torch in his hand. Unusually pale, there was that in his eyes I had never seen before, but debauch had been powerless before such a man as he; and when he spoke to me, it was in that cold and distant tone I knew and dreaded.

"What do you want with me, boy?"

"Captain," I said, drawing in my breath as a wounded man, "the Frenchman is in the engine-room destroying the ship. I think he has killed Jack Harvey. If you would go down, Captain!"

He was quite unmoved, and he walked before me down the corridor until he came to the door of the saloon. Then he flashed his lantern upon the débris of carousal and upon its victims, and with a savage cry of anger he kicked the prone men and bade them awaken. When they opened their eyes, the engineer Dingo first of all, Black dragged them to their feet as though they had been children, and fell upon them with such blows that I thought they had been struck dead upon the spot.

"Ye sots, will ye drink salt?" he roared. Their answer was to stagger after him, they knew not why or whither, but like men upon whom the shadow of death has fallen. When he reached the engine-room and turned the glow of his lamp upon the scene, it was some while before he discovered the figure of

Jack-o'-Lantern, who lay in a welter of blood near the dynamo. A savage cry followed upon its disclosure, and almost immediately afterward we espied the Leopard crouching by the main pumps and babbling like a witless fellow who has stumbled suddenly upon a horror.

It was awful to see Black at this moment, to hear the roar which escaped him, and to look upon his face. For I should tell you that the engineer Dingo had got back sufficient sense by this time to switch on the reserve battery and to give us light; and so we stood in its warm glow to watch this fierce encounter between the maddened Captain and the cat-like mutineer. No one interfered, nor do I think that Black wished for any interference. The moaning Frenchman, whose knife glittered as the light struck upon it, became an animal again at his enemy's approach. He crouched as a leopard about to spring, uttered a low hiss of warning and then leaped upon the Captain. Then I thought that Black was surely done for, and I almost feared to watch them, though I should have known better than that. Was not this the man who had faced the mutineers of Ice Haven single-handed? Had I not seen him confronted by death many a time and the master ever?

What, then, had he to fear from the puny Frenchman, mad in drink as he was and almost blind with fury? At a hazard the answer might be, nothing at all. And yet think of what might have been.

The Leopard sprang out like an animal, leaping high into the air, and then aiming such a blow at Black that his skull would have been cleaved to the gorge had the knife gone home. Another would have reeled before such an attack, perhaps would have aimed a wild blow in return, and been cut to the bone in so doing. Not so Black, who had the eye of an eagle and a hand as quick. His was a more subtle way, and standing boldly up to the man he caught the fellow by the wrist so dexterously that the quickest hardly perceived the trick of it. Holding him in the vise-like grip, he bent him backward slowly, caught his feet from under him and put a huge knee upon his chest. I heard the bones cracking as bones are cracked by a dog, and I thought that the Frenchman's arm was gone, and that it would not lift a knife again for many a long day.

This was a dreadful scene, and I would well draw the curtain upon it. If I cannot do so wholly it is because of that sense of truth which bids me tell you both the best and the worst of the pirates. I must speak of Black in his better moods and of those which reveal the darker side. We had gone down to the engine-room, remember, upon the very verge of death by suffocation. Another ten minutes and we had all perished miserably, lying through all eternity at the bottom of the sea, imprisoned in that coffin of steel. To such had debauch and the treachery of debauch brought us. And now awakening had

come, some glimmer of sense, and by sense salvation. Dazed and reeling as the engineer Dingo was, he had yet wits enough to get at the liquid oxygen and flood the ship with a breath of life. Men, who were gasping like fishes one instant, were capering like fools at a fair the next. And with their salvation came a savage, a rebellious anger against the man who had put the cup of death to their lips. Regardless of his screams of pain, of his wounded limb, of the agony he suffered, they demanded the uttermost penalty of their savage law. "Kill him! Kill him!" was their cry.

Black answered it in two words. "Brand him!" he roared, and the words were hardly spoken when the wire was made ready and the current switched on.

They were to brand him by burning wires laid straight to his flesh from the dynamo. Such a fearful torture could have been devised by these men alone. Pity was unknown to them. They gloated, I do believe, upon the hiss of burning fat; the awful wails uttered by the writhing man were music to them. I saw the fire tracing the indelible letters I saw blood, and flesh shrivelled up together, and, giddy at the sight, I implored Black for God's sake to desist. I might as well have addressed myself to the iron pillar at my elbow. There and then they would have done the wretched man to death but for an accident of the night as terrible as it now seems to have been inevitable.

They were in the midst of their horrid task, the Frenchman lay upon his back with his breast red with fire; loud cries were uttered; men capered like demons beneath the glow of the lamp, when, without any warning, the *Zero* shivered to her spine, and for an instant threatened to roll over and over as a bottle may be rolled upon a floor. Never was such a turn-about. Thrown from their foothold, the pirates were pitched headlong. Some shrieked that the ship had foundered — others turned upon Black with savage oaths. He struck them down and clambered up the ladder with giant steps. I heard him pass along the corridor and enter the conning-tower, and then the bells above me rang out loudly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CAVES OF VARES

THE tremour which shook the *Zero* was not repeated, and after many minutes I knew that she was rising to the surface. The men, called by the bells from their mad panic, presently began to understand that there was still a hope for them, and they snatched at it as the drowning at a straw. All were quite sobered by this time and as quick at their work as any man-o'-war's men. I heard the hum of the dynamo and the steady rise and fall of the pumps which emptied our cisterns. To that there succeeded a rush of cold air filling the ship, and then a signal which no man might mistake at such an hour. We had come to the surface of the sea and lay there at rest. The genius of the Master had brought us out of the Pit. I tell you that the men would have hurled themselves at Black's feet for very gratitude. Howling, blubbering, laughing, the crew surged to the platform and lay there in all attitudes, some prone upon their stomachs with their arms outspread; others raising gnarled hands to the sky as though it had drawn them upward; others, again, in a dead faint because of the horror of their fears. For my part,

I think that I trembled from head to foot when at last I climbed out into the night air and stood by Black's side. The horror of it all had come near to robbing me of my senses.

We find our tongues at such moments as these, and I must have said many foolish things to the Captain in that instant of deliverance. He heard me patiently, for even he had been shaken; and when I asked him how it had gone with us, he told me readily enough.

"Yonder," he said, indicating a black rock upon which the seas foamed and spouted, "yonder is the reef of Vares. We touched the fringe of it and heard the dogs barking. Another foot, lad, and this ship and all aboard would have gone to glory. That comes of overmuch good liquor and a wild eye on the chart; I must have made fifty miles more than I reckoned it — it's easy to do it in these waters. You'll be knowing that we're off the Spanish coast — you've sense in your head to have guessed that much. Well, then, yon high light is on the headland, and two points to westward finds us homeward bound. Will ye be glad to be ashore a while, my lad? I doubt it not, though God knows ye have pluck enough for your years."

I was gratified that he should speak in this way of me, a man so little given to praise of other men. Pirate and outlaw that he may have been, his own courage was beyond all experience magnificent, and

it was only human that I should wish to have his praise. So I told him frankly that I was very glad to see the land again, while I wondered that he, on his part, could view it without misgiving. To which he responded with one of those kindly smiles which never failed to win upon the affection of his friends.

"Oh," says he, "'tis a pretty enough shore upon a dark night, and that's gospel truth, my lad. Yon's the coast of Spain, and many a good friend of mine tells his beads on the mountains. Go a step across them and I will show you the most desolate country in all the earth. That's why I've a fancy to pitch my tent there, for to be sure there are many who would sing hymns if they knew that Black had landed. We'll lie here until the hunt is over, and then head for the Americas. Will ye visit America with me? Would ye like to do that, my lad? Well, ye've no choice, I reckon, for if I put ye ashore now, the hands would burn you alive, by thunder!"

He jerked a thumb over his shoulder to indicate the men, who were now recovered from their first stupor, and peered at the distant shore as at a land of promise where their labours would be ended. Dawn had broken in the east by this time, and a wan light spread across the gray heavens and anon lifted the veil from the chill sea. As a diaphanous panorama of solitude, the scene unfolded — here showing jagged rocks about which the seas gambolled as bears at their

play; there, uplifting a vast head of cliff which might have been the rampart of a mighty fortress. Of ships, there was no sign whatever. I saw a wild waste of dull waters; a swell surging majestically westward — but of the living world of men and deeds, no evidence whatever. And this was our haven; here we were to anchor with our treasure.

Well, the men were ready enough, as may be imagined. When hot coffee had been served round, we began to head for the shore, all the hands but Dingo and the helmsman on the platform, and such a frequent sounding with the lead that even a landsman might have guessed the hazard of the venture. If there were any danger to be apprehended on the landward side, Black paid little heed to it. All his wit and seamanship seemed set upon the task of keeping us from the hydra-headed rocks, by which we passed so closely sometimes that a man could have tossed a biscuit to them. Standing by the conning-tower, I peered down into the clear water, and could see the treacherous shoals which had wrecked countless ships and were the monuments to unnumbered dead. And all the time the line would be running out and the leadsman crying, "Watch, there, watch," quite in the old-fashioned way of tarry seamen. Thus we drew near the tremendous cliffs, and I fell to amazement alike at their grandeur and the forbidding face they showed to us. It seemed madness to talk of going ashore at such a spot.

Osbart had come up from his cabin by this time and he took his stand beside me, wearing quite a jaunty air. Just as the coast of England affrighted him, so did this wild land please him by the magnificence of its solitudes. He spoke of it as others speak of home, and echoed Black's hope that here he would rest awhile from his labours.

"We lie up three days to get the stuff in order," he said, "and then I guess I'll see something of Paris. Why, it's nearly seven years since I was in that same city, Strong; seven years since I clapped eyes on the beautiful ladies of the *Rat Noir*. I've got some leeway to make up, and I'll lose no time in doing it. It will be your turn to do sentry-go in the Caves of Vares this time. Black spoke of that yesterday. He means to leave you to boss the show when he's gone, and I don't envy you the task. Did he speak about it at all?"

I told him that not a word had been said, nor did I understand him at all. What he meant by the Caves of Vares passed my comprehension. As to his talk of my being left alone with the men, he might as well have spoken of murder at once if Black were to be believed. And so I told him pretty plainly.

"I am as far from being with you in this, Osbart," I said, "as you are from London. You know that as well as I do. If Black puts the men under me, he is throwing me back upon a conception of my

duty which circumstances hitherto have allowed me to forget. I cannot believe any such thing. Has he not just told me himself that some of the hands would kill me if I were left alone with them? I believe every word of it is true, and so do you."

A sardonic smile crossed his hard face, and I think he was well pleased to see me in this quagmire of apprehension. His own attitude toward me had always been difficult to understand. Sometimes I thought he was right down jealous of my influence with Black; at other times I accepted a halting friendship upon his side, and had to make it a reality. Perhaps I shall never know the whole truth. Certainly the morning did not tell it to me, for we were still at the vague talk when the leadsman cried, "By the deep, six," and instantly upon that came the bell to stand by in the engine-room, and I heard it answered, and then the signal, "Dead slow." We had drawn up to the very face of the monstrous headland, and far above us, peered on the altitude of a dominant crag, a crucifix stood out against the sky as an emblem of this strange world of desolation to whose gate we had come.

Was this, then, the haven of which Black had spoken almost with the love of a son for a homestead? I looked back over the rolling seas to the labyrinth of crags upon which the breakers sported. I saw a dim horizon destitute of ships; landward were the forbidden rocks, the mighty wall of granite pre-

senting its impregnable face to the Atlantic. This our haven? Inconceivable and yet most wonderful!

You know that the leadsman had called, "By the deep, six." Now, as though to witness the changing sea beneath us, he called, "By the mark, twenty," so that we must have passed from six fathoms to twenty in as many feet of our drifting. A spell further, and the rocks before us opened as though a Titan's axe had cleaved them to the base. I saw that we had rounded a bluff of the cliff, and found behind it a little circular basin for all the world like a pool between two spurs of the great cliff. Into this we passed so slowly that I knew not whether the propellers were driving us or no. The swell of the open gave place to the gentler waters of this tiny natural harbour. A sombre light enveloped us, and from the darkness of that natural cleft I heard strange voices hailing us in what I believed to be the Spanish tongue.

"Good God! Osbart," I cried, "is this the place — is this where we are to lie?"

He smiled with vain love of a mystery, and pointed to the figures of the strangers, who, it seemed, were hanging like monkeys to the sheer face of the cliff, three of them, clad in rags but wearing vast sombreros, as though the sun would shine down such a chimney as this.

"Men and brothers," he said drolly, "particular friends of the skipper, and very ready with the knives, Strong. I'll introduce you when we go ashore ——"

"Ashore!" I cried, "ashore in such a pit as this?" It amused him as a child's answer amuses the grown man.

"Oh," said he, "their wives can cook famously if you do not mind the garlic. Have a care how you make love to them, Strong, for I assure you the señors are a hasty people. We must now go below, I think — yes, the Captain is about to give the order. But it will not be for many minutes — and then, my boy, as good a breakfast as ever you ate in your life."

Well, I had no words for it, nor could any have been spoken. Black's loud command, "All hands below!" sent us immediately to the depths, and we crowded there in the corridors as though it were but the delay of an instant, as it proved to be. Rising as swiftly as she had sunk, the *Zero* came to the surface once more, and the hatches were opened. I stepped to the platform, to be blinded by a flash of radiant light, to see strange figures awaiting me, and to know that we had come up in the bowels of the mountains and that there were the Caves of Vares of which the Captain had spoken.

A prison, you say. Aye, but what a prison! No scene more wonderful has ever been opened to the eyes of man. Let all else but the Caves of Vares fade from Black's story and it will still be read through the generations.

And of these caves I was to be the master for many days. I shall now tell you how that came to be.

CHAPTER XIX

WE BRING THE TREASURE ASHORE

HAD it not been for the wonder of the scene, my mind would have cast itself back to the method of our entry, and that, I think, would have affrighted me beyond any ordinary curiosity concerning the place.

Recall how we had sunk below the waters of the outer basin, then risen as quickly to find ourselves in the first of the caves. Passing, I suppose, through a natural tunnel, we had come to this black bower of the sea. Had we happed upon such a cave by accident — as lads will by any seashore — we should have found it dank, and dark, and dripping. Not so at Vares. Here a master-magician had been at work, I doubt not for many years. Great arc lamps flooded the water as with beams of unearthly light. There was a wide landing-stage with steps leading to a kind of natural platform which ran quite round this vast dungeon of the deep. I saw countless tunnels radiating outward from a common centre; while high above me, as upon the roof of an unimagined cathedral, star-like clusters of lamps dazed the senses with their suggestion of altitude.

A circular cave with an infinity of tunnels radiat-

ing from it. A glorious flood of the purest light — a platform to step upon, and, at the stairs' head, the figures of twenty wild men who shouted and huzza'd at Black's coming as at the welcome of a king. This was my first impression of Vares. When we had made the *Zero* fast at the quay prepared for her, we followed the leader of the men through the central tunnel, and again I shrank at the wonder of it. A palace had been revealed to me as at the touch of a wizard's wand. I stood n wonderland, and my tongue could utter no word.

Here was a room of vast size, square in shape, but with a natural apse as its western end. I judged that it would have been in black darkness but for the number of the electric lamps which glowed in every nook and cranny. So many were they that the stupendous apse seemed nothing else than an arch of golden light, while there was not a ledge of the schist-like walls which had not its ornaments of balls. Trembling in the air with all its suggestion of reserve power, was the hum of a dynamo which fed this abundance — and even a stranger might imagine that the rise and fall of the tides in the caverns was the motive force Black had employed so cleverly. The same force drove the fans by which the cavern was ventilated, and the air came in as pure and sweet as from the morning sea.

Of the furniture of the great cave I could get but a vague notion upon my entry. Not only was there

much of it, but it was so fantastic, and had come from so many countries, that the eye was confused and all sense of proportion clean gone from me. A table, to be sure, ran down the centre of the cavern and glimmered with gold and silver plate. I saw piles of bear-skins, chiefly of the polar bear, just as I had seen them years ago in the Rue Joubert at Paris. There were cabinets a-many, and few that were not filled with rare china of the cloisonné enamel of Japan. From China had come vases and porcelain of the Ming and Kang-Hi periods; and in contrast to this patronage of art, there stood a long open table covered from end to end with models of ships and guns, which would have delighted any boy.

Black had spoken to me of his love of pictures, and I was surprised to see so few of them in the cavern. One gruesome thing, in which a ship's crew was about to roll their captain in a spiked barrel, hung in a niche above a considerable fireplace; but it was meretricious and quite unworthy of the Captain's keen judgment; while the others were mere chromos and not to be named at all. It occurred to me, even at this time, that the atmosphere of the place must be unsuitable to any work of art; and yet against that stood the fact that the cave seemed as dry as a bone. When I detected an electric heater with twenty bulbs standing where the fire should have stood, I began to understand how this great brain had solved

the riddle, and what science had done to link the nineteenth century to B.C. 7000.

Now, all this was the mental note I made upon my entry into the cavern. I have told you of the uncouth company of Spaniards which received us there, and of the resounding cheers with which they hailed the Captain; but presently I discovered that cheering was not the chief business of their lives, for they began to wait upon us all directly we had passed the door — and one of them, a burly man with a Jew's nose and ear-rings, called out our names from a slip of paper and doffed his sombrero hat as each man answered him Mine was the third name on the list and when I cried "Here," a Spaniard of the company at once stepped up to me and said he was my servant.

"A little Engleesh, my lord," he said, laughing all over his face. I turned to Osbart and asked what he would have me to do.

"Why," said the Doctor, "to wash yourself I must be supposing," and he laughed as though it were the best thing he had said for a long while. "Look at yourself in a glass, man," cried he, very pleased with himself; "you have the face of a nigger minstrel. Upon my word, Strong, you would make a living at Ramsgate if I could find you a banjo; just take a peep at yourself, and then ask for a camera. Why, man, you'll make a famine in soap when you begin."

I reminded him that he himself could hardly sit

for a figure of one of the Graces — for the truth was that no man had washed upon the *Zero* since the hour of the terror — and then I turned to follow the Spaniard. The bedroom to which he led me lay beyond the second of the tunnels counting from the centre. The sea had hewed it ages ago from a stratum of a beautiful green stone, so pure that it might have been aqua marine. A heavy curtain covered the arch by which you entered in, and a second curtain shut it from a bath-room which was nothing more or less than a deep natural pool, whose depths were lighted by a cluster of electric lights set in a silver sconce. Here the Spaniard left me with a profound bow and the intimation that he would "very much come back when the señor shall singee out," a term, I suppose, he had got from the pirates.

You will know that I had left Ice Haven with hardly a rag to my back. I was, therefore, both surprised and delighted to find new clothes set out upon my bed, both underlinen and a fine shirt of silk, with a very good suit of grey flannels which I was to find very useful in the caves. A dressing-table of French buhl had been set in a niche of the cave, and upon this there was laid out a good set of silver boxes and brushes and all that a fastidious man might look for in a house of luxury. The bed was of good brass in the English fashion, and had mosquito curtains about it, a very necessary precaution in such a place. Altogether, I may say that

this bedroom delighted me both by its natural wonders and its many witnesses to the good taste of those who had furnished it. When I had taken a cold bath and put on my new clothes, I went back to the great hall and there found Black and the crew.

We had breakfast immediately, a full round meal with the unsurpassable chocolate of Spain and a rare kind of mullet I had eaten before in those waters. Wine was served in abundance afterward, and some excellent cigarettes of an exceedingly delicate fragrance. The men themselves, content to be ashore after such strenuous days afloat, lolled about in all attitudes, drinking and smoking and telling their wild tales. We were waited upon obsequiously by the Spaniards, who seemed devoted to Black and did him homage in a fashion which money had made extravagant. When the meal was done, and this could not have been until after midday, the Captain bade me follow him to his own room, and there I learned again of his intention to set out immediately for Paris, as he had threatened to do when upon the ship.

"There's business to be done, my lad," said he, "and it's not unconnected with the gold we carried away from Ice Haven. If I left you here with that, I should look for trouble when I came back. We spend the afternoon doing clerks' work, and to-night finds me on my road to Paris. You will stand in my place when I am gone. I ask nothing of you but to

protect the lives of the men I am leaving behind me — and that's a thing your own English law would not forbid you to do. These men have a duty to do toward me, and I believe they will do it. If there's a man that does not, name him to me, and, so help me Heaven, I'll burn him alive when I come back. That's what I'm going to tell them before I go. They're right at bottom and well enough when they keep off the spirits. When they fall upon these, look out for yourself, and remember that one man could hold this room against a regiment. You'll regard it as your own while I'm away — and that won't be for long if all goes well. You may expect me in three days from now, Strong; not later if I can help it."

I had some difficulty in finding a rejoinder to this. His request seemed plausible enough, and since he would not set me free — and I knew he dare not do that because of the men — I could not refuse the other part of it. But I reminded him of what he said on the *Zero* concerning my own danger, and this found him far from his ease.

"You will have Jack-o'-Lantern for your mate," he said, "and him I trust. His wound's no more than a scratch, and he'll soon forget it. The engineer Dingo is clever enough on board, but a fool ashore. Mind the big fellow, Red Roger, and if he shows his teeth, pull 'em out. You may count on Jack to the ladder's head. I shall look to find you ready for sea

when I come in. Remember, my lad, that you are under some obligation to me, and that I am putting you in a position of trust beyond ordinary. Do your duty by me — as I have done mine by you."

He was never a man to listen to argument, and he would listen to none then. No sooner were the words spoken than we returned to the great cavern and called the hands to attention. I knew that some of the treasure, at any rate, was to be got from the hold of the *Zero*, and I went to the quay-side as to a cave of Adullam where fabulous wealth was harboured. Soon there was a stir about, a going to and fro of a kind I had never witnessed when the pirates were ashore. Some shouted for the Spaniards to take themselves off; others unscrewed a steel hatch from the *Zero* and slung a little crane above it. Great boxes were hoisted and carried upon iron shoulders to one of the caverns. I saw bags which tinkled with a jingle of beads. There were bars wrapped in waste which had come from the engine-room, and a glint of gold shone where the waste had unwrapped itself. All this, I say, was carried expeditiously to one of the caverns and there laid upon the bare floor. Then a monstrous door of iron was swung to upon us, and all the truth revealed.

I had read of treasure since I was a mere lad; but never have I thought that the sight of it could so move me.

Here upon the floor of the cave were bars of gold

so many that the walls might have been encrusted with them: diamonds ran as pebbles through the fingers which clutched at them; there were emeralds, rubies, sapphires to catch the beams of light and cast them back in radiance of unsurpassable beauty, green and blood-red and the deepest shade of violet. Upon these the pirates fell with a lust of gold inconceivable. They hugged the gold bars to their hairy breasts; fingered the precious stones until blood ran from their hands; filled their mouths with jewels and spat them out again. And then they turned to the coins, to vast heaps of gold pieces drawn from the coffers of the nations; and, a kind of madness overcoming them, they shouted and sang and rocked drunkenly in their delirium.

Here was an orgie which Black permitted to run its course. I judged that he deemed it prudent rather to show indulgence toward their intoxication than to suppress it. When the worst of the madness had passed, he called for some attention and obtained it. I saw that the treasure was to be divided up between the hands upon a ratio I could hardly understand. Very scrupulously the Captain began to estimate the values and to apportion them — he himself taking twenty shares, as I made out, to every five that the Doctor claimed. The men's share was a unit to every hundred of the Captain's, if I may trust my judgment in the matter. But, however it might have been, they divided the heap; and as each man re-

ceived his share, a great iron box with his name inscribed upon it was dragged forward, and the gold — save such treasure as each desired to keep in his own possession — heaped into it. Immediately upon this a great flag was lifted from the floor of the cavern and a black orifice disclosed. I heard a sound as of the ebb and flow of the sea, and then a light shone out from the depths and disclosed a swirl of black water and the glitter of schists and the sheen of gold-green rocks. A cave lay beneath a cave, I saw, and thither the sea flowed.

Now, it was evident that the bulk of the treasure was to be transferred to a long-boat which lay tethered in the depths, and that this boat was to be manned by Jack-o'-Lantern alone. One by one the boxes and the bars were lowered down to him, and his answering hail re-echoed. I heard a splash of oars as the boat moved off, and then the light was doused immediately and the great stone stirred to its place. Of the whole treasure there remained but a bag of precious stones in Black's hand and the heaps of coin which the men had retained for their own purpose. The latter were gathered up with that prodigal indifference which might have been expected from such a company. Men thrust fists full of sovereigns into tarry pockets or poured their loathsome gains into canvas bags which they thrust into their bosoms or slung about their necks as though they had been scapulas. Mere lust of gold had given place

to the merriment of a useless possession — nor could I but reflect that the veriest pebble was here of as much value as the whitest diamond a nigger ever took from a mine.

Ah, that treasure! What blood and tears and the groans of men had not gone to its making! How many a good ship had passed to the desolation of eternal waters that these pirates might satiate their lust in the black night of reckoning! I thought of the women who had wept because of it; of the graves yet open for the dead over whom they would never close; of the lights which would shine no more in many a house of love because these men had sailed the seas. And a kind of fury took possession of me so that I could have killed them where they stood, and the great Captain first of all, even though he had called me son.

I had suffered in this way once before at Ice Haven, and, to be sure, my anger was vain enough. Impotent amidst these bloody villains, the changing scenes of their lives were the true antidote to any temper of black revolt and, perhaps, they alone saved me from a madness. Here, in the Caverns of Vares, I might know more solitary hours, but not yet. The treasure was divided, but upon that there followed immediately the departure of Black and Osbart and the bustle attending it. But a brief moment I had with the Captain before he set out in the *Zero*, and that was ominous enough, for he put a revolver

into my hand — the first time I had ever carried arms since they trapped me on the Nameless Ship — and he bade me use it should the need arise.

"Ye may have trouble with Spaniards, but I doubt it," says he; "the man Red Roger must be watched, though he's all right when not in the drink. Stand nothing from him, lad. I'd as lief find his bones as his body when I come back. Shoot him on sight if he begins to bark; ye have my word for it, and your safety's much to me."

I did not remind him that all this talk of shooting was wild enough; nor did I blame him for putting me in a situation of such peril He would have listened to nothing of the kind, and, for that matter, he had another word to say which was of a different order altogether.

"There's the Frenchman to be thought of," he said. "I would have you prudent in that matter. The man's gone stark mad, and I must look for another to take his place. That's partly what sends me to Paris and then to Brest. We're shorthanded on the *Zero*, and we need new blood. I'll find it at Brest among those that can be trusted. Meanwhile, do you and Jack-o'-Lantern see that the French devil lies where he is. I fear him, my lad; the others may be wild enough, but this man has brains, and when you have brains against you, you have danger. Keep him where he lies, and if he dies, let him rot. That's my last word to you. You do your duty by me and you'll not regret it in the days to come."

I made no answer, for the *Zero* already stirred at her moorings, and I saw that he would go aboard. Now was I to be left alone in the caverns with these unspeakable monsters. And the great Captain had spoken of the "days to come."

What, in God's name, had the "days to come" to do with me? Was not this day all-sufficient, and how should I dare to look beyond it to any hope of liberty or of the o'd life from which Destiny had snatched me thus a second time.

No, for a truth, my spirit fell to its nadir as the *Zero* sank to the depths and, passing from my sight, went out to the open sea.

CHAPTER XX

THE SILENCE OF THE CAVERN

I WATCHED the *Zero* sink beneath the black water and knew that I stood alone. Not a sound but that of the ebb and flow of the sea was now to be heard in the cavern, and there came to me the idea that I was buried alive in a vast tomb, and would never hear a human voice again.

This was a very dreadful thought, and set me shuddering. I looked up to the black roof and remembered the mighty headland which rose above it, a mountain upon the border of the sea. An intense desire for the light of the sun and the open face of day took possession of me, so that a word would have sent me plunging into the pool to swim out either to death or to my liberty.

Beyond all, I think it was the mystery of the tunnels which affrighted me. Whither did they run, and were they but so many blind alleys leading into the bowels of the mountain? A more daring thought said that by one of them a man must be able to pass out to the open country; for if he could not, by what means had the Spaniards come into the caverns at all?

Curiosity was upon me now, and a desire to ex-

plore the labyrinth. I went a little way down one of the tunnels, and was brought up suddenly by a sound of raging waters as though a river ran out into the sea and here broke into a cataract. There was no light in the tunnel nor any indication of the river's course; and fearful of a false step I returned to the great cavern. Whatever were the secrets of the dread place, I quickly perceived the nature of the peril which must attend their discovery. Well had Black boasted that this haven was impregnable.

You have heard that the Spaniards had been sent away when we divided the treasure, and I was not a little taken aback to find three of them at the water's edge when I returned. Very civil in their manner, one of them proved to be my own servant, who had apologized for his "very little Engleesh," and he now stepped forward and asked me, with a fine flourish of his sombrero, whether I would "take anything for the eatings." When I asked him what time it was, he produced an old silver watch from the profound depths of a shabby crimson coat and was proud to answer, "eights of the clock, my lord, *preciso*," a thing which astonished me, for I believed it to be still afternoon.

I told the fellow, as well as I could, to bring me some supper to the Captain's room; and while he served me a little fish and some excellent Spanish sherry, I asked him many questions both of himself and of the caves. Of the former he spoke readily

enough, and what between scraps of French and a fearful wrestling with our own tongue, he managed to tell me that he had been one of the famous Civil Guards of Spain. Authority, he avowed, had treated him ill and had trumped up charges altogether beneath the notice of a gentleman. So here he was the servant of the great Captain, and willing to die for him, as he said — though I make no doubt that he would have cut any man's throat for a guinea.

Of the caves he would say very little. I gathered that they were a famous place with the gentry of the neighbourhood, the wild Spaniards of the western hills, who shot at the law by day and made a jest of it by night. Such rogues had found a friend in Black and were his sworn allies; but as the Spaniard said, there were few of them now living who had the secret of the great cavern. The others were — and here he shrugged his shoulders as one who should say, "They were too curious, my lord."

For all his villainous looks, I liked this Spaniard, and was glad to have him near me. No man who has not lived in them can picture the black solitude of the Caves of Vares or the mortal spell of that immeasurable tomb. I swear that I would sooner have lived a year on a remote atoll of the Pacific than a day by the black waters of the cavern. When the Spaniard left me, a new and intolerable fear of the night overtook me, and I went to my bedroom immediately, and tried to lose in sleep the phantoms which pursued me.

Vain effort, for sleep was far from my eyes, and every sound set me bolt upright. I believed that Black had utterly deserted me, and that I should never see the *Zero* again.

To be sure it was all wild enough, and yet there were excuses. At one time I heard the voices of men very plainly, and could say they were Spaniards who occupied one of the caverns near by my own. The drone of their disputes rose and fell as the surge of the sea; and when the rhythm of it was broken by a loud cry, I recalled the account my servant had given of them, and I listened intently for a message of tragedy. None came, however, and presently the sounds died away and all that I could hear was the story written by the recording finger of the deep. Ebb and flow, ebb and flow . . . it ran as a song in my head, and upon it I think I must have slept, but so lightly that a breath upon my eyes would have awakened me.

There was another sound anon, and it was more ominous. I woke from my sleep as one who turns upon a dream, and lay with my eyes half closed, listening for the voices of the Spaniards. Thus it was that I first heard the murmur of a lamentation beyond all experience woeful. To begin with I thought it the cry of an animal; by and by I came to say that it was a human voice, the voice of a man in his agony, and that it came to me across the water of the outer basin. Lying there with ear intent, I tried

to discover the nationality of the sufferer and his whereabouts, but could make nothing of it. Reason said that one of the Spaniards had been hurt in a quarrel and that he lay wounded in the apartment next my own. Driven by the thought, I slipped on my clothes and went out to the great cavern, thence to the water-side. There I heard the voice very plainly but could not locate it. It was just as though a man had been shut in some dark place and cried piteously but could get no hearing. Vainly, I crept to the water's edge and bent my ear to the surging tide. The sounds were high above me; they came from the black roof of the grotto — as they called the outer basin — and they had sunk until they were but a low groaning.

It would have been at this point that I began to have a clearer conception of this strange experience and to say with some confidence that the man who suffered was the Frenchman. That he had been kept in close confinement since the madness of the mutiny, I did not doubt; and now it appeared that he was a prisoner, here in the Caves of Vares, and that wounds and neglect of them had brought him to this pass. Of this I was sure when I had listened a little while longer; and, hot with anger that the man should have been so treated, I called to him and implored him to answer me. Then I thought that I heard a faint murmur of a response: but this was the intolerable thing, that I was still unable to say whence the voice came.

Now, I had always liked the "Leopard," and I would have given much to have served him that night. You shall judge, then, of my situation when I found myself neither able to visit the man in his cell, if cell it were, nor to find any who would do that service for me. Going back to the great cavern, I discovered but a glimmer of light there and no evidence of any occupation at all. A loud cry for my servant remained unanswered; I peered into this cave and that, but could hap upon no traces of the Spaniards. And so I came to believe at last that I was quite alone in that black place, and that, for all I could do for him, the Frenchman must die where he lay.

I shall not dwell upon my thoughts during that long night of suspense. Of sleep I had none; nor could I banish from my ears for a single instant the groans and cries of the man thus cruelly punished for an hour of madness. When a truce fell, it was upon the coming of my Spanish servant at daybreak, who listened very civilly to my story and said that he would make it his business to visit the prisoner. He himself had known the Frenchman formerly, and there had been a certain *camaraderie* between them, it appeared, so that he was very much surprised to have the news, and went off immediately to succour his friend. At the same time, he advised me very earnestly to have nothing to do with it; and since I perceived that he was to be trusted in the matter, I

left it to him and got back to my bed about six of the morning. When next I awoke it was two of the afternoon, and the *Zero* had returned to her moorings.

Now, had I been in any doubt about this, the cries and laughter which reached me from the great cavern would have set my mind at rest. I perceived that our fellows had returned and were celebrating the occasion with one of those bouts of drinking in which Black's men indulged whenever opportunity showed as much as an eyelid at an open door. Going out into the great cave, I discovered a veritable feast set out, tables spread, bottles opened, and all the emblems of orgie. Of the men there, two were newcomers and unknown to me; one, a fine figure of an American whom they called Jerry Carr; the other a veritable Viking, whose real name I believe was Kanokoff, but whom the crew dubbed "Can-o'-coffee," in the way that seamen have. Both these men were far gone in liquor when I entered the room, and I saw, to my sorrow, that even our trusty Jack had not been proof against the temptation of the keg. As for the others, their attitude was frankly hostile, and I had hardly set foot in the place when the brute, Red Roger, stood up like a huge gorilla and thrust a jug of wine into my face.

"Ho," says he, "the little fairy boy. Wal, I reckon I want to see him dance, and dance he shall, by thunder." And then, with a giant's insolence,

he cried: "Here, you, drink and be d —— to you!" And he splashed my face with the wine.

I struck the man a heavy blow on the point of the chin, and he went down like a felled ox. It was hardly done when the newcomers and the nigger Sambo were on their legs and their knives flashing. But they were too far gone in drink to do me a real mischief, and while they rolled impotently on the floor, and their horrible oaths echoed in the cavern, I bade Jack-o'-Lantern follow me, and we went out to the Captain's room.

"Jack," said I, "that's no place for the Captain's friend. What has happened to you, Jack?"

He pulled himself together, blinking his queer eye, and groping for his memory. His talk had always been strange, and I found it unchanged.

"Why," says he, as though in apology, "a drop of good drink never did a seaman harm yet, though to be sure, sir, yon stuff would bite a piece out of a snake. I give you my duty, sir, and report that we're come aboard."

"Jack, Jack," said I, "and what would the Captain say if he heard talk like that? Set your legs down both together, man. You are not walking on a tight-rope. That's better, Jack; and now tell me, what of the 'Leopard,' what have you done with him?"

He seemed to think about it, scratching his head and chewing upon a ridiculous cutty pipe he would never abandon, whatever the circumstances.

"Aye," says he at last, "a bad man, true, by thunder; a bad man, sir. So, you see, I just clapped a hitch about his tiller, d —— n me if I didn't."

"You locked him up, Jack; do you fear him, then?"

He became very serious.

"I'll tell you this," he said with unwonted emphasis, "we're in a clove hitch with that there Frenchman as sure as you and me sail this ship together. Do ye mind Bell Fairweather that was sent by the Yankees to cut your throats aboard the *Celsis*? Why, yes, you do, says you, and here's another of 'em, leastwise, where our skipper's concerned. I don't trust that man, sir, no more than Thames mud. Give him a chain's length and we swing — by the Lord, we swing high. The Captain knows it, and me, his mate, knows it too. He'll get a cinch on us if he ever goes ashore, you lay to on that, sir."

And then he added, while a horrible smile stole over his patched face:

"But he ain't goin' ashore, mind me; he's as far from shore as from hell's alley, and a derned sight farther to be sure. You lay to on that, sir. Jack's the boy, says you, and so he is, by thunder. Captain trusts Jack, to be sure he do. Keep that in your head, sir; him as dies hard don't cry soft. I wouldn't give sawdust for no Frenchman's chances when the skipper comes back. Let him rip, says you, and the skipper's the man, be sure he is."

It was black talk and I shrank from it.

"But, Jack," said I, "you don't mean to say that the Captain will kill him?"

He evaded the question, and cleverely fell back with a generality.

"Jenny Frenchman goes, we swing!" he harped as the liquor drove him back upon a maudlin stupor. "Well, where's the human nater in that? Skipper, he don't take no chantses, not he, by the Lord. So there you are, master, and that's the bilge in your gunpowder. We'll hear the skipper about it. You and me are the mates on this deck, and there'll be plenty to do with the fo'c'sle hands while there's rum in the cask. If you doubt it, listen to 'em now, sir. Did you ever hear such hell's music in all your life?"

Well, a seaman might have called it that, to be sure, and yet it had another meaning for me even while Jack was speaking. Mingled with the oaths and the curses which came to us from the great cavern was a voice I recognized for that of the "Leopard"; and I knew in a flash that the man had escaped from his prison and that the drunken hands had taken him. A moment later, Jack-o'-Lantern knew it also, and with a wild cry he swung about on his heel and rolled from the cavern.

"They'll skin him alive, by thunder!" he roared.

I believed every word of it, and, lagging but an instant to see that my revolver was loaded, I followed him down the tunnel and came out at the water's edge.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PLUNGE

THERE were many thoughts in my head as I ran from the place; but chiefly this, that if the Frenchman should escape, the secret of the Caves of Vares would be known to all Europe within four-and-twenty hours, and all these pirates as surely doomed as though the ropes were already about their necks.

To this, reason answered that there could be no escape, either for the "Leopard" or the rest of us. We were shut down in those caverns beneath the mountain; the sea was the gate of our prison. So it must befall that either the brutes would kill their man, as they had threatened, or that we must kill them to save the life of one who would have betrayed Black and his ship. Never were two in such a quandary as Jack-o'-Lantern and I when we burst in upon the madman.

They had caught the mutineer — how I may never learn, but they had him surely; and there he lay in the midst of them, his face ashen pale, and the clothes half-torn from his back. Such a spectacle as he presented, with his flesh all scarred by the terrible branding-iron, and his eyes sunk in after long nights

of suffering — such a spectacle, I say, should have moved even a brute to pity. But as well might a man have lifted his hands to the granite rocks as to these pirates, besotted with drink and aflame with the blood lust. No company of devils had been more pitiless as they threw their man down and drew their knives upon him. The horrid cry, "Flay him!" rang through the grotto as the roar of a savage animal; it was answered by a baying assent, as of hounds that have fallen upon their quarry. I saw that we had not a minute to lose, and, disregarding Jack's appeal, I drew my revolver, and fired point-blank at the drunkards.

Depict a cavern of the remote seas, with a roof of jagged rock, and the surging water for the best part of its floor; a group of men, knives drawn and sleeves rolled up, kneeling about a huddled figure, which cried to God in its terror. Let there be a glow of clear white light from the arc lamps above, and you have the scene as Jack and I beheld it when we came out from the Captain's room. An instant later and the revolver shot rang out with a reverberating echo, which rolled away in lingering thunder to the very bowels of the mountain. I had sent out my challenge to those human devils, and one of them, the Yankee, had fallen. Raging like a beast, he rolled over and over upon the grey floor, into the loom of the smoke, and out of it again, so that when he came to a rest it was at my very feet. And there

he lay, bleeding at the mouth and swearing he would have the life out of me.

"You white-livered cub," he would roar, and upon that another oath and a new threat of what he would do presently. But I was quite unafraid of him, and thrusting him aside with my foot, I called to Jack to look out for himself.

"Mark the Dane!" I cried; and he answered me by lifting a great club of iron and felling Kanokoff as though he were an ox.

"Put that in your coffee-pot," he bellowed; and then, threatening him as he tried to rise, "stand clear of me, will you?" And I think that he struck the Dane a second time, while I shot haphazard at Red Roger, and saw him duck as though a stone had been thrown. Immediately there was a roar of fury which no words could tell. Men, reeling in drink, picked up what weapons they could, and came at us headlong. I saw faces leering into my own through the smoke and mist; raucous voices cried out in pain or exultation; there were the swish of blows and the heavier sound of bodies that were struck. And all the time I cried to Jack to have at them, and heard his cheery "Aye, aye, sir," as music in the mêlée.

God alone knows how we came out of that affair as we did. That there would have been a sorry story to tell but for the Frenchman I have no manner of doubt. Two to five as we were, and they hulking

fellows who, when sober, had been a match for twenty, even Black's pistol might have proved a poor argument but for a new turn which instantly directed all their fury in another quarter, and saved our lives, as I must believe.

This befell at the very height of the fray, when Jack had closed with Dingo, the engineer, and bent him backward until his bones cracked; while I played a boy's game about the cavern with the brute Red Roger. Then might you have said that we were done for and as good as dead men already; but this was the very moment when some one — I think it would have been Jerry Carr — cried out that the Frenchman was off, and instantly a truce fell, and every man regarded his neighbour aghast. Here was a turnabout which even their drunken ferocity might not pass by. It held them in a grip of wonder and dismay.

Now, the grotto was murky with smoke and the arc lights none too bright — for we had made a rare mess of the electricity since the "Leopard" was disrated — and so it happened that I did not understand immediately what the outcry was about. When I perceived the truth, it was Jack himself who pointed it out to me, indicating a spot high up on the wall of the cavern, where the Frenchman crouched like a wildcat and spat his defiance upon his enemies.

Stripped of the best part of his clothes, his white flesh shone out against the black rock as a painting

upon a wall in monotone; and I could see his grinning face and protruding teeth with a distinctness which revolted me. Another moment and I heard Jack cry to me to shoot him, for God's sake, or every man would hang.

"Shoot, sir, shoot!" he roared. "Would ye have us swing, every man Jack? Shoot, for God's sake, sir ——" And the others took it up, howling and stamping like devils, while the pistol hung idly from my fingers, and I looked from one to the other as though I did not hear aright.

How could I shoot the man? What had he done to me or to these pirates? My honour bade me stand by Black where honour was not an offence against my fellows; but that it should dictate such a bloody crime as this was not to be believed. And so I told them, the while they stormed and swore and vowed to have the life out of me.

"Let any man take a step this way, and that's his last!" I cried back to them. Their rejoinder was another howl of rage; and upon that they flung themselves at the rock and began to climb it, maladroitly and with feet trained to no such task.

"Up, boys, up with you!" they roared; and one by one, Jack-o'-Lantern leading them, they followed after the "Leopard," whose words stung them as whips. But a hand's-breadth now and they would take him; and yet what a gap beween them and fortune! For who would have imagined the thing

as it befell and as these eyes witnessed it in the grotto of Vares? Not I, for a truth, nor any who may read this narrative.

The wall was steep and the holding none too good. Of the pirates, the giant Red Roger made nothing of the job at all, and, losing his foothold at the start, he slipped back to the quay with a bellow.

More cunning at the task, I saw that Jack-o'-Lantern climbed the treacherous slope with a seaman's foot and the instinct of a born mountaineer. He was up and within an arm's length of his enemy before the others had hardly begun to climb at all, and, coming to a gap between two spurs of the rock, he sat there to reason with the "Leopard." As well might he have addressed the surging water beneath him. Laughing like a grown child, the Frenchman bandied words with them all and defied them to come on.

"*Assassins*, have you the fear? Why do you not come up here for me? Shall you be afraid? I tell you I go to the police this night to tell them you are here. Ha, ha! do you like that, *mes enfants*? I go to the police, and they shall be arrived to visit your ship. *Cochons*, do you not hear me? Then I have pleasures to wait until you shall come to me."

His irony, carried to far greater lengths than my memory of it, and vastly coarser, moved the pirates to a fine fury. Sambo, the nigger, had now climbed to Jack's side, and, stung by the deft shafts of a

mocking wit, he, of a sudden, tried to leap across the gap at the Frenchman. But he missed his foothold, and being struck full in the face as he came, he fell headlong into the black pool below, and diverted every eye from the grinning French monkey on his rocky perch. Every one liked Sambo, the nigger, and certainly I had no wish to see him drown. Running to the bank of the pool, I caught the black's outstretched hand as he rose to the surface. But he was still but half out of the water when a loud shout from above caused me to let go of him, and, looking up, I saw the "Leopard" poised upon the rock like a diver for the plunge. A moment later and he dropped with unimaginable grace straight as an arrow to the very centre of the basin.

It was done now; yet who could say that it was done?

The man had gone to his death — aye, but had he? Was it possible that this daring fellow, a splendid swimmer as his mates avowed, was it possible that he had dived clean under the tunnel to the outer sea, and was already at the foot of the headland? It might be so. But, even if it were, what then? Could he swim so far along the impregnable shore that he would find a cave or inlet, or must he perish at the cavern's gate? All this, I say, passed through my head like a flash while I watched the circling ripples and waited at a tension to see if he would rise. When the eddies died away at last, I knew

the truth. The "Leopard" had escaped; his fate was on the knees of the gods.

Well, you never saw whiter faces than those of the men, who now grouped themselves at the quay-side and stared like wondering children at the mirror of the water. All the fight was out of them by this time, and the truce had brought some of the serving Spaniards to the cavern. These joined us to gaze into the pool; and there we all stood, hardly exchanging a word, and full of our fears. Would the man come up, or would he not? Answer at last began to press upon question, and then the truth to emerge. The thing was done and the "Leopard" gone. A thousand eyes staring into the pool could not have made it otherwise.

"He be gone, surely," said Jack at last; and then he asked, "What will the Captain say to that, lads?"

"Aye, what will the Captain say?" echoed Red Roger. "It's mighty fine news for the Captain, d——n me. Clean gone, like a fish horf of a 'ook. And where's he a makin' for, mates? Ask yourselves that, principally."

The nigger joined in, pleased to be a pessimist.

"He gone right dam to the fishes, that's where he'm gone, massa. Don't you worry about lickle French gentleman. He no come back, sure and sartin."

"I reckon if he haf, we tam well do hang," said the Dane; and here he was joined by the wounded

Jerry Carr, who lay huddled on the quay, quite indifferent to his hurt.

"Bully for us and the skipper, too," the fellow said, hugging his side to quench the flow of blood. I turned to him and offered my help, but he spurned me with an oath.

"Wait till I get a cinch on you," he snarled, "and I'll wring your head off your shoulders, by thunder!"

This defiance struck a new note, and I made no doubt that it would have been echoed by the others, ripe for a villainy, but for the glimmer of an idea which came to the engineer, Dingo, and was not to be passed by.

If the Frenchman had lived through the waters of the tunnel, and was harboured in the cave outside, what easier than to board the *Zero* and to take him where he stood? No sooner put to them than every man Jack seemed ripe for it. Crying, "All aboard to go below!" the man Dingo leaped to the platform of the ship and swung the hatches open. I saw the nigger Sambo tumble aboard, Jack and the Dane after him. Even the wounded Yankee crawled to the water's edge, and swore he would not be left. They pulled him down with unpitying hands, and cast the warpings free. And then, almost before I realized that I stood alone, the *Zero* sank into the bosom of the pool and the surges foamed in the pit.

For a long while I stood watching the dwindling eddies and reflecting upon the tremendous hazard of this venture. Let the pirates succeed, and I knew

that they would tear the "Leopard" to pieces, as wild beasts tear a sheep in the jungle. But let them fail — aye, and what then? What of Black's ship, of the secrets of the caverns, of the vast treasure they harboured? Let the Frenchman get clear away, and the nations would thunder at these doors before a new day dawned. Such a truth must be heard before all others. I said that the hour was momentous beyond any in Black's life, and yet he could know nothing of it.

A Spaniard at my elbow recalled me from the reverie, and I saw that he, with his fellows, who had fled from the brawl, was now returned to the grotto, and by no means unacquainted with the situation. A certain insolence attended the man's offer of service, and when I gave him an order he laughed in my face. The great Captain's absence had made mutineers of these wild men of the hills, as it had made madmen of his own crew, and I could not but reflect that a rash word might bring them upon me headlong. To be quit of them chiefly, but also to be alone with an idea which had come to me, I returned to Black's room, and shut the iron door upon the Spaniards. A clock told me that it was five of the afternoon, but the beat of its pendulum was the only sound that I heard in that still cavern. Hot and weary, and worn out with the suspense of it all, I lay upon the bed, and thought anew of all that had befallen us since the Captain went away.

What a Nemesis was this, that he should shut me in this gloomy prison when my liberty might have been all precious to him! Could I but have gained the heights, and sent a message such as I had conceived, he might even yet outwit his foes. But that was out of the question while the Spaniards stood between me and my liberty. That they themselves would pass freely from the caverns to the heights, I never doubted. And now it came to me that Black himself would never have been caught in such a snare, and that there must be another door to the hills if I could but find it.

This latter thought attracted me beyond others, and I returned to it again and again. There must be a road to the hills, I said, and a good wit should find it. I remembered that my own life might depend upon such a discovery should the *Zero* not return to the caves; and this firing me to an endeavour, I rose from my bed at the very instant the lights in the cavern failed and left me in black darkness.

To move now was a hazardous task. I had but little acquaintance with Black's room, and when I opened the iron door a hand's-breadth there was no light in the tunnel beyond to help me out. Standing there, I could hear the songs and laughter of the Spaniards, and presently, while I peered intently down the passage, a man's bright eyes met my own, and I knew that he was ready to spring, as a tiger at its prey. Prudence said that it would be madness

to engage in a brawl with such a fellow; and, slamming the door in his face, I turned back to the cavern with my hope at an ebb.

I have told you that the electric light failed suddenly and left me in utter darkness. Such was the truth as my eyes perceived it; but when they had become a little accustomed to the swift change, they began to tell another story. I became aware that the darkness had given place to a gloom as of twilight; and, searching for the source of this, I discovered it presently at the far end of the room, where faint rays of a filtered light split the rock in twain, and disclosed an aperture of whose existence I had never doubted. In a flash I surmised that this was Black's secret door, this the exit to the mountain of which he alone was the master. And by it I also might pass to the heights!

I had matches upon me, and I struck one of them and examined the place more carefully.

And first I discovered a lantern hanging from a ring in the solid rock; and, lighting this, I could see other rings at intervals, and they were such as men use to climb up from a depth when a permanent ladder is desirable. As for the light which had beckoned me to the spot, I could see a star far, far above me, and I said it would be almost at the headland's height — a fearful goal, but not unattainable. Calling upon my courage, I slung the lantern to my arm with my handkerchief, and, gripping the rings

firmly, I began to go up. Step by step, my heart in my mouth, and a horrid fear of the abyss driving me, I mounted that fearful chimney, and watched the light grow clearer. A slip upon that smooth iron, a moment's dizziness, and my brains had been dashed out for a certainty. But a cold determination sent me on, and, clinging with trembling fingers to the iron rings, I dragged myself up and up, ever toward the day and my liberty.

I shall tell you no more of this dire exploit than to say that I achieved it in the end, with hands blistered and fingers cold as ice, and with such a torture of brain and body that I hurled myself from the pit more dead than alive. Lying prostrate, as it seemed, for the best part of an hour, burning rays upon my face and God's air from the sea in my lungs, I opened my eyes at last to find myself in a grassy hollow over whose high banks I could see nothing but an infinitely blue sky and the great golden ball of the sun rolling through the ether. A spell and I had climbed the steep, to discover myself upon the very summit of the great headland, with such a panorama of sea and sky unfolded that I stood transfixed as one who has happed upon a new world. Oh, glorious to stand there and feel the salt breezes upon my face; glorious to say that I was free and the cavern a prison no longer!

It was a sea bare of ships as I then beheld it; and when the breath of it, as life in my veins, had

given me back my strength, I turned my eyes landward and began to inspect the country. There is no more desolate shore than this of the extreme north-west of the Spanish peninsula, and I could well understand why Black had chosen it for his haven. West and east and south I saw nothing but rolling downs of the stubbly grass, bleak and lonely and forbidding. Not a house, not a man; no loom of a city's smoke nor spire of a village church upon all my horizon. Had I been a new Columbus come to discover the western world, assuredly would I have turned my ships about, and thought of home again. The idea of helping Black by a vague telegram — which he would understand — to one of the Paris newspapers now appeared a chimera indeed. I lay upon the grass to laugh at myself that such an idea should have come to me; and as I lay I saw the *Zero* rise to the surface of the sea, perhaps at a distance of a mile from the shore.

Now this was something beyond all expectation, and it fired my curiosity in no common way.

The pirates had set out to capture the Frenchman if they could; yet here they were grown reckless beyond all imagination, and so little mindful of the Captain's orders that they sailed boldly westward as though to the coast of France. Amazed beyond all belief, I lay and watched that beautiful silver ship, as she sported in the foam or plunged like some great fish into the rollers of the bay. No

one stood upon her platform, and it was evident that her hatches were closed. As she had appeared, without any warning, a sheen of silver in the green waters, so did she disappear; but not before I had espied another ship, steaming straight toward the headland from the northern horizon, and now so clearly to be seen that all doubt of her was at an end.

She was a French cruiser, I said, and no man might doubt that she had discovered the *Zero* and started in pursuit of her.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HORROR OF THE "VENGEUR"

I HEARD a step beside me on the hard grass, and, looking up, I found myself face to face with the "Leopard." He was almost naked, his hands were cut and bleeding, his wounded arm hung limp by his side. Panting like a dog, he lay at my feet, and told me almost in a sentence that he had climbed the headland.

"I was born at Chambéry," he said in his own idiom, "among the mountains, monsieur. Englishmen know Jules Marchand, the guide. So I am train. Better the broken neck than the skin off the body. *Là bas*, they are all devils when the Captain is away. Very well, I away also until he come. He shall give them the back on the rope. Very good man, the Captain, when he not have the thunderstorm. *Mon Dieu*, he burn like the lightnings then; but afterward it is the blue sky, and he laugh. I go to him and say, 'Pardon,' and he shall give me the handshake. For the others, not so; they take the ship out. Captain say that very bad. Oh, my dam, there shall be the skin off the back for that."

I laughed at the drollery of it, and then asked

him if he had seen the cruiser. When he replied, "Certainly; she is the *Vengeur*, from Toulon," I remembered that he was a seaman, and likely to miss nothing the horizon could show him.

"Why should she be here?" I asked him. "Do you think they have discovered the caves? Has any one betrayed the Captain?" He shook his head.

"They hunt the bay," he said. "Why for not? If be they discover, all the worse for them. That's what I say when I see the *Zero* come up. Cruiser go to hell by and by. Much better if they were not my countrymen, monsieur; I have sorrow for that. But I am the servant of the Captain, and what can I do? Captain Black, he the greatest man that ever have live in the world. If my countrymen so big fool as to send the ship, they pay the price as well as any other. The *Vengeur* never go back to Toulon again, sure and certain. She, what you say, done and gone for."

"Then it's an accident that brought her here, Marchand?"

He shrugged his shoulders with a Frenchman's gesture.

"*Probablement.* But she will not remain, monsieur; she will pay the price. *Ecco*, you shall see."

He repeated this, using the Italian exclamation again and again; and, being now a little recovered, he turned flat upon his stomach, and gazed intently down upon the hither sea. Fascinated by his vague

words, which I could not but understand, I also turned my eyes upon the ship; and so we lay, side by side, watching the approaching cruiser, and wondering, perchance, if a tenth part of what we feared for her was in the minds of those who manned her.

What a placid scene! How still the sea! How characteristic of a desolate ocean whose waves beat upon a land of solitudes! Search it to a remote horizon, and the eye could detect no ship upon the broad of the waters. Gulls wheeled above the black islands as though to scare men from their dangers. Mingling in a sensuous play of colours were blues such as Murillo would have loved, greens which were not greens until the sea played upon them, the jewels of the impregnable ramparts, the gold fleck of the burning sun. Not a sound arose but that of the screeching birds. The ship's propeller made thunder in the silence as she drew in toward the land. And she was doomed beyond hope; three hundred souls aboard her would never see the sun rise again! I trembled at the horror of the thought. It came upon me as a chill wind blowing out of the night. Death! It was there upon the sea, and a man might have heard the beating of its wings.

Upon the other side stood the palpable fact that the *Vengeur* knew the secrets of the caves, and had come to search them. I could not doubt it as I watched her. Viewed from that high place, every

movement upon the bridge was plainly visible. I saw officers with gold epaulets spying out the shore; there were leadsmen in the forechains, a group of soldiers aft, a busying to and fro which could not be mistaken. Anon, I heard the bells ring out, and saw the ship bring to. The fearful dread which had been upon me began to pass away. Our men had fled from her, I said; it must be that. When I told Marchand as much, he laughed aloud. This was a fine spectacle to him; he had forgotten all about his countrymen, it appeared.

"Our people very wise," he said, half turning his head; "they know how to wait. Be glad you are not down there, *mon ami*. Death a very bad thing, but, *mon Dieu*, the death they will die! Wait a little while, just a little while, and then ——"

I made no answer, for the drama held me spell-bound. A loud cry of "*Ecco!*" from my companion found me gazing with hot eyes at a ripple upon the water, such a ripple as a great fish might have made when pursuing or pursued; and I followed it almost from our own inlet to the very hull of the *Vengeur*. There it ceased, and for an instant, during which a man might have cried aloud for pity, there was no sound upon all the sea.

Of that which followed after, my first memory is of a low murmur as of thunder at the pit of the sea. The air about me quivered, and was followed by a cool breeze which seemed drawn down from

above to the vortex of the deep. I looked at the *Vengeur*, and thought she was unchanged. The confusion upon her decks, the wild shouts, the leaping figures of men — all might have been the horseplay of clowns in a pantomime. The unreality of it, the belief that the cruiser had escaped the danger, impressed itself upon my mind, and could not be shaken. From this I passed to a kind of curiosity. The ship had listed to port, I saw, and so swiftly that all on her decks were tumbled pell-mell into a black heap by her bulwarks. Carried across the sea, their screams and cries hardly seemed louder than those of the gulls that circled above them. It was impossible to watch them without a certain contempt for their craven panic; and yet how unjust a censure! The truth lay hidden from our eyes. It was a truth of fire.

A loud cry from the Frenchman first called my attention to this. I looked at the *Vengeur* and saw a puff of black smoke drift up amidships and go floating over the still sea. Immediately a flame of fire followed upon the smoke, and sent the doomed wretches headlong to the fo'c'stle. Now, as though a judgment had fallen on the ship, the flame ran crimson from stem to stern of her. I saw men burned to cinders where they stood; others withered as leaves in a devouring furnace. The roar of the fire, the scream of voices, the confusion, the agony set me trembling as with an ague. I cried to God

to have mercy upon them, and tried to shut the scene from my eyes. It was a vain hope. The very terror of it compelled me to bear witness.

How long the *Vengeur* burned before she sank I cannot tell you. It seemed to me that the horror endured a full hour, during which many a brave fellow leaped to the waves and was swallowed up by them. When the end came, it was quite suddenly, and in a strange way. Listed to port, as I have said, the cruiser heeled more and more in that direction, until at last she turned right over, and showed her keel plates to the sun. All her beautiful yacht-like lines were disclosed then, and even her propellers were to be seen as they raced violently at that moment of her dissolution. For a brief spell she seemed to rest thus upon the surface of the sea; then, with a roar that made the headland tremble, she went down in a whirl of foam, and left the rushing waters to the dying and the dead. Now, I knew that her boilers had burst when she sank, and I began to think of the *Zero* and of what might have happened to her. Had the shock of this explosion harmed the devils who wrought this mischief, or had it left them scathless?

The ship herself answered the question, rising to the surface immediately, and showing excited men leaping to her platform. I heard the hellish laughter with which they met the shrieks from the wretches who perished beneath the foaming breakers; I saw

them thrust the drowning under, and mock them at the instant of death. A holocaust at the altar of their safety, it may be that even one living man cast up upon that shore would have betrayed them irrevocably. So fury fell upon them as a pestilence; they were as madmen who knew not the meaning of mercy.

The records have stated that three men and a woman escaped from the *Vengeur*; the men upon deck rafts, the woman, if a girl of fifteen can ever be called a woman, by swimming to the shore, and lying hid upon a spur of the rocks until a fishing-boat discovered her, and she was carried to Vigo. Of these things neither Jules nor I saw anything at all during the tragedy or afterward. There were so many poor souls struggling in the waters, so many burned by the fire or killed by the desperadoes on the *Zero*, that the passing of one or two might well have escaped us. The child herself — Irma de Loisel — whose daring exploit was the talk of all France, I myself have met and heard in Paris since that dread day. She tells me that she saw both Marchand and myself very clearly, and that we were standing on the very summit of the headland; but of this I have no memory, and it seems to me that for long hours after the *Vengeur* went down I lay motionless on the grass, afraid to go down to the caverns, afraid of the desolate country all about me, afraid even of myself.

Revolt against circumstance now possessed me as a fever. I remembered that I was the preserver of

these bloody pirates — in a way abetting their crimes. The spell of the great Captain no longer dominated the scene. What had been a splendid challenge to the world when he commanded the *Zero* had become a devilish orgy of blood and crime and horror in his absence. But for my word which I had passed to him, I would have fled the scene and gone out to the wild lands as to a haven opened by the hand of Almighty God. Against this was my pledge and the knowledge that he would return and judge the man — aye, and beyond that, the magic of his name and the wonder of his deeds. Go I could not; the pit revolted me ; the night might deliver me to unknown perils of the wild men of the hill lands. I could decide upon no settled plan, and I watched the sun sink in the far west and wondered if I had seen Black for the last time. The day—would it bring him or his enemies to Vares?

Such a quenching of the spirit was but ill understood by my companion. Like his fellows, the blood lust fell upon the "Leopard" with irresistible frenzy, and when it had passed he suffered a torpor of mind and body which endured for some hours, but did not find him repentant. As the twilight changed to darkness a new vivacity took possession of him, and he began to remember that he had not eaten since daybreak. This was a problem in which he delighted, and, despite the danger, he declared that our commissariat should not suffer.

"They all drunk by this time," he said cheerily. "Jules go down and fetch the meats, and nobody not any wisers. Remain here, *mon ami*, until I shall say the word, but chiefly you shall take care not to show the body to any man. Will you not eat, sir? Have you not the hunger anywhere? Me, I am ravening."

I told him that I was hungry enough, and bade him go as he proposed. It was not lost upon me that he did not re-enter the caves by the chimney I had climbed, but followed another path to a larger orifice upon the opposite side. Into this he disappeared, and was gone perhaps the better part of an hour. When he returned, his pockets were stuffed out with bottles of wine, and every loose fold of his coat baggy with the bread and meat he had managed to steal. Such a merry fellow I had not met for a long time, and his English was always a delight to hear.

"All drunk," he said, throwing himself down beside me, and producing the victuals in triumph; "one, two, twenty Spaniards, all drunk. Your friend, Red Roger, the most beastliest drunk of all. He filthy man, Red Roger, big as the wine butt; you fill him once, twice, all no good — he empty again before you begin. *Attendez*, monsieur, I hit him on the nose, and he think he see the corpse. So I came away to the dinner, and *voilà*, there it is."

Well, it was welcome enough, and we made light

work of it. I don't think I have ever been so hungry in all my life, and, as Marchand confessed to the same condition, we sat and ate in silence until darkness had come down upon the sea. Cigarettes were then lighted, and some talk of the night set afoot. Should we return to the Captain's room to sleep, or bivouac out here under the silent stars? I was all for that, the horror of the pirates being still upon me. The "Leopard" offered no opposition. "The caves all hot," he said; "no airs to blow upon the face. We have much music down there — every man Jack sing the song and all drunk. Here a man shall sleep at his easiness. Time to go down tomorrow, when the reason come back and the head dizzy. So I say, *mon ami, faut rester*, and afterward to the great Captain, who will flog the rope on the back."

He went on to say that we had better sleep in the hollow, for the Spaniards might be passing in and out from the main gate of the cavern, while assuredly there would be none at the Captain's door.

With this I agreed, and we were on the point of going down when, chancing to look out to sea, I perceived a spreading arc of light upon the far horizon, and instantly called his attention to it. A low whistle betrayed his alarm, and well it might have done, for hardly had the first light appeared when a second shone out a little to the westward, and

anon a third right over to the east of the bay. This was menacing enough, but we were still all agog with a perplexity when I heard the sound of a distant drum as clearly as ever I heard anything in all my life. It came to us from the landward side, and could be taken for nothing else than a tattoo beaten by soldiers. Such a thing voiced on the wind of the night set my heart leaping as nothing I had heard for many a long day.

"Marchand," I cried wildly, "listen to that! Don't you hear them, man — the soldiers?"

He turned about and clutched my arm in his eagerness.

"*Si, si,*" he said, "the soldiers. Then, monsieur, the great Captain is betrayed."

"Who could have betrayed him, Marchand?"

"I tell you it was have been the Spaniards. Who else shall it have be? *Sapristi!* I have spoke the monition always. Do not trust the Spaniards, I have said. You see what have become with it. The great Captain is betrayed. All is lost — all, all."

"Then you are quite sure, Marchand, that the soldiers are coming to the caves?"

"Who would doubt it — the ships and the soldiers? They send the *Vengeur* to patrol, but she will be avenged, *certainement;* no man down there will live to-morrow. And we, monsieur, we are very fortunate. The *bon Dieu* have spared us. We go to Vigo together, and then to Paris. It is finished, I

tell you; and afterward we shall find the Captain, and tell him so."

I thought upon it a minute, and then put a frank question to him:

"Should not we warn them, Marchand? Would it not be honourable to do that?"

He spat the words out with contempt.

"Honourable? Name of a dog? Honourable to them?"

And then he said very solemnly:

"Monsieur, if it were not for my master, I would lead the soldiers there myself."

I could make no rejoinder to this. My word had been passed to Black; but if others had betrayed him, who should lay it at my door? And what would a warning be worth to men already far gone in liquor and incapable of lifting a hand either in defence or attack? As it was, decreed, so, for all that I could do, must it befall. I thought of my own condition, of our ship and the good friends aboard it, of their anxiety concerning me, their hopes, their fears, and their affections. The hour of my deliverance was at hand. But at what a cost in life and treasure!

The sound of the drum had ceased by this time, but, if we had any doubt of its meaning, a flicker of fire upon the moorland behind us soon set that at rest. It was now possible to say that a regiment of soldiers had been marched to Vares, and would

bivouac on the open plain for the night, proceeding, as I must suppose, to the attack early on the following morning. So near were they to us that their fires showed us the busy figures of the detachments told off for this or that duty. We could see them about their soup kettles or busy with the faggots. It was even possible to hear a faint carolling of song, such as soldiers raise when the day's work has been well done. Turning our eyes from them and looking seaward, we made out the shapes of the warships with wonderful distinctness, a good moon helping us and their own searchlights declaring now one, now another of them. Presently they drew quite near to the shore, and began to drop their anchors. Boats were manned and lowered, while launches puffed and rolled upon the seaway. I saw that these were drawing in to spy out the land, and even then some idea of what they would do occurred to me.

"Marchand," I said, "what if they dam the inlet? What of the *Zero* then?"

He had not thought of it.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "but that is the very great, magnificent notion. All go to hell then, *mon ami;* all block up and die. You have said well. All gone dam when that done."

"They are going to do it all the same. Look at that launch right below us. She's sounding the channel and spying out the rock. They mean to blast the cliff, and if they do, God help the Captain!"

He saw it clearly enough, and his interest drew him to the very edge of the precipice, down which we gazed entranced. Far, far below us was that puny boat, whose crew worked like niggers in the flare of the searchlight. Not a moment had they lost when the ships dropped anchor, and not a moment would they lose now. We could see nimble sailors — and it transpired afterwards that both French and Spanish warships had been sent to the task — we could see them hanging to the spurs of the cliffs, and drilling the solid rock with all the cleverness and the swiftness that sailors can command. Presently they signalled to the distant ships that their work was done, and the launch drawing away, we knew that the fatal moment had come. And at that we ourselves drew back and lay face downward to the grass for very fear of it.

I was once in an earthquake in Italy, and I can give you no better account of that awful moment than to say that the ground rocked beneath our feet — for that was the impression of it — just as it had done at Rocella, where I had seen a town destroyed as though the hand of Almighty God had touched it in anger. It may have been that the rushing winds which smote our faces, the flaming fires which burst from the rock, the swishing of the sea and the distortion of the searchlights contrived this delusion. I cannot tell you truly; but such was my apprehension of it, and such an impression remains.

Sick and giddy, and believing that the very mountain would slip away beneath us and cast us down headlong, I clutched the grass and tried to shut the picture from my eyes; while the rolling thunder of the detonation drummed horribly in my ears, and the air came hot as a flame from the sea. As for Jules Marchand, he shrieked like a woman when the shock came, pawed the ground with convulsive hands, and cried out that we were dead men. So thick was the smoke, so impregnated the air with particles of dust, that quite a long while passed before I could as much as see him where he lay. The terror had enveloped us as in a fold of the blackest night, and we were hushed in the darkness, almost afraid of the sound of our own voices.

"Are you hurt, Marchand?" I asked him at last. His response was a woman's wail of lamentation, and then a cry that he was blinded.

"They have taken away my eyes. My God! I am all blackness; it is dark, my comrade, dark, dark. I shall never see the daytime no more."

"Oh, come," said I, out of patience with his cowardice, "look again, man; look straight out to sea, and then tell me. Can you see nothing now?"

He lifted his head, and one of the searchlights, sending a bright beam swinging over the headland, the light fell full upon his eyes, and he opened them, to blink like a boy and to find a boy's gladness.

"Oh, my dam, I see the sun and the stars

altogether!" he cried, and so great was the reaction that he shouted and sobbed all in a breath. I, however, had crawled to the edge of the cliff, and, looking down, I perceived that the inlet to the Caves of Vares was no more.

"They've done it now, Marchand," I cried back to him. "My God! the door is down."

He looked over with me, and a sardonic laugh escaped him. To this day I do not know whether Jules Marchand was a traitor or a friend to Black. Perhaps he was each in turn as the mood suited him. Crime commands no sure allegiance, however splendid the criminal.

"You speak right," he said, with a grin. "The devil have lock the door all right, and the rats is in the trap. *Sacre bleu*, they all dry the skin to-morrow when the soldier dogs go down. No more *Zero* now, my comrade; no more of the golds and the silver, eh? Very well, you and me come back by and the by, and we find him, eh? These devils all cold meat to-morrow. And the Captain, he in my own Paris to drink the white wine and eat the good dinner, and care not a ver little dam what happen. So ho! we shall be off immediately, you and me, my comrade."

I made no answer to him. A step upon the grass found me springing to my feet in wild alarm, fearful that the soldiers had already come.

But when I looked again I saw it was the great Captain, and that he stood alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CAVERN OF THE TORRENTS

THE searchlights of the warships still wavered upon the headland, and must have disclosed his splendid figure as he stood there, upon the very edge of the precipice, defiant and motionless.

A challenge had been thrown out to the civilized world, and these great ships were the answer to it! Doomed as it seemed, beyond any hope of salvation, the door of his prison closed for ever, the soldiers standing sentinels on the hills, thus he answered them. A black figure upon the tremendous rock, so has the world last seen him; and such is the picture of him which dwells most surely in my memory.

I have called him the "Great Captain," and so he shall ever be to me, both for the magnitude of his attainments and the method of them. Betrayed this night, as it would appear, ignominious death awaiting him, never had he been cooler or more scornful of his enemies. I saw a swift glance cast out to sea, another to the distant bivouac, than with an indescribable gesture of contempt, he turned to me.

"At what hour did the *Vengeur* make this shore, my lad?" he asked in his gentlest tone. I told him it would have been about nine o'clock. "And the soldiers?" he went on. They had come, I said, about an hour ago.

He nodded and addressed himself to Marchand.

"I have no good account of you," he observed; "if you would go to Paris, there is the road. Be swift to take it."

The "Leopard," who had cringed before him like an animal, now drew himself up and answered with all a Frenchman's dignity.

"Captain, I will my life destroy before I go. Why shall you send me away from you?"

"Because you do not know how to be faithful, Marchand."

"Oh, monsieur, say not so. I am mad and I forget. But in my heart there is love for the great Captain always — always."

"Then show it by your conduct now. Come, we will go down."

He spoke as though it were a common affair of a common night, and yet, my God! what an act of madness it seemed to me. To go down into that pit of horrors—a pit from which flight henceforth must be impossible; to court a living tomb; to bend his head to fate and say, "It is decreed" — was this the Black I had known? And yet the command was unmistakable; and we, who would so

willingly have fled from these catacombs of darkness and despair, we followed him without a word to share whatever fate his destiny had written.

I would tell you that we did not go in by the chimney I had climbed, but by that other door through which Marchand had visited the Spaniards. Here, in a granite vestibule beneath the hollow of the headland, we found a common wooden ladder some thirty feet in length, and we went down by it to a chill cave wherein a single lamp was burning. From this we passed down a vaulted tunnel, so low that a man must go astoop, so winding that the outstretched hands could hardly direct the feet aright. Beyond there lay the orifice to a black pit and a second ladder, longer than the first, and so frail that a weak head would have reeled to see it bending. Down this we went, and again down a third ladder of like length, until at last we stood in a wide cave, and there discovered the Spaniards in all attitudes of sleep and drowsiness; a company of fierce men, whose capes shielded evil faces from the light, whose wit had been washed out by the bottle long hours ago. Among these Black strode, until, halting before a prone figure, he kicked it with his boot and bade the sleeper awaken.

The man muttered an oath, rolling upon his side and crying out that he should be left to sleep. A second kick opened his eyes and brought him giddily to his feet. He stared wildly at Black, put his hand

to his side as though to find his knife, and dropped it as quickly. Then the Captain spoke:

"Your friends are encamped on the high land," he said quietly; "go to them and get your reward."

"My reward, Señor Captain!"

"I have said it. In a week's time you shall be garroted at Vigo. Go and make your peace, then. These others, who have served me well, will know to-morrow who has betrayed them. I leave them to reckon with you should your friends, the soldiers, be so foolish as to lose you. Go, dog of a Spaniard, before I remember what you have done."

He had become angry in an instant, and his anger no living man had yet learned to face. As for the Spaniard, he slunk away like a whipped hound; but he was still at some distance from the ladder's foot when two of his fellows, awakened from their sleep and auditors of the Captain's accusation, sprang upon him from the shadows and drove their knives into his back with a sound of torn flesh which turned the heart sick. To them Black spoke a few words in the Spanish tongue, and immediately upon it the other Spaniards awoke to a babel of alarm and confusion beyond all reason. I saw then that the word had been passed and the truth made known. The hillmen were trapped, and by their own wit must they win a road to safety.

We left them to the orgy of a drunken panic, and, descending a winding stair which led to the

great cavern, a sound as of a man screaming fell upon our ears. A few steps farther and the cavern, now lighted only by lanterns, showed me the figure of the man Red Roger, triced up to the bare rock and stark naked but for a pair of seaman's breeches about his loins. Holding a flare aloft was Jack-o'-Lantern; while Ned Jolly, who had been to Paris with Black, as they told me, whirled a stout whip of buffalo hide about his head and almost cut the bully in two at every lash. Such a roaring of oaths and imprecations I have never heard before and never shall hear again. The very roof flung the screams of agony back to us, while the whip tore the flesh in strips and left it hanging down the back of that brutal wretch who had sworn to have my life but a few brief hours ago.

I would have interceded with Black to have spared this fellow, but here had been a useless thing, for he was cast free and fell fainting upon the cavern floor almost as we entered in. The others, grown ashen gray in the extremity of their fear, men face to face with accusation and the gallows, now crowded about the Captain to give news or to receive it. Amid a frenzy of talk, hands uplifted, witness sworn in filthy phrase, I gathered that the truth was known, and that nevermore would the *Zero* go out from Vares by that door whereby she had entered in. Upon this, there comes the tidings of the soldiers and the bivouac; and then, I think, the ultimate madness of the panic fell upon

them all, save the man who should win life or death for them as the judgment ran.

Oh, to hear them in that hour of reckoning! To see them wringing their hands like women, crying for the gold that was lost, cursing the hour which brought them into Spain! To be with them while they ran helter-skelter, some to the outer basin to test the soundings anew; others up to the caves where the Spaniards lay; then back again to the Captain's side to beg salvation upon their knees. And through it all Black remained immobile. It seemed an age before he spoke at all.

"The ship to the pool!"

The command rang out in brazen tones and was caught up by the wretches as a message of their deliverance.

"The ship to the pool!"

What it meant I knew not; yet I saw Jack-o'-Lantern go leaping down to the basin, and after him the engineer Dingo; while fighting for footway were Sambo the nigger, the gunner Ned Jolly, and the giant Red Roger, reeling and faint and mad for safety. A second cry from the Captain, "Load up and stand by!" was echoed as willingly by a crew already crowding the platform of the ship and lifting her steel hatches.

From them Black turned to Osbart and the Frenchman, and, beckoning me to follow him, he led the way to his own cabin and slammed the door that the riff-raff might not hear him.

"Osbart," says he, going straight to his table, "would you give me the chart of Vares that Guichard made in the year '90? 'Tis there on the shelf behind you, the little book in the green cover. Thank you, and now I'll take a cigar, if you don't mind, and just a glass of the old stuff to clear my head. Drink up, my lads, and put a bit of colour into your faces. Would ye have the soldiers taking you for women when they come in? Then drink and be d —— d to them."

The jest fell ill in that dark place, and I could see Osbart's hand shake as he took the bottle from the Captain and then poured himself out a stiff glass of the brandy. Here he was imitated neither by the "Leopard" nor by me; but, drawing closer to the table, we watched Black as he unfolded the canvas-backed chart and laid it out before him. What was in that alert mind now? What miracle of a chance could be tempting it — what phantom of an idea? For a full quarter of an hour there was not a sound in the cave save that of the deep breathing of men and of the seconds as the great clock numbered them.

"We are wanting three days to the flood," says the Captain at last.

Marchand rejoined that it would be just six tides.

"Ah," says he, "and that's five tides too late for us, but we'll sing hymns that it's not at the neap, surely. Just hand me the compasses, will you,

Doctor, and another match for my cigar? The man that sold the box will hear from me when I walk into London. Now, quite quiet everybody for just two minutes. So long, and then I'll tell you."

The minutes were hours, both of them. The silence in the cave was not less profound, but a new sound came to us from without, just as though water had been set running behind the wall of rock and would burst in upon us presently. No one but myself seemed to notice this, and I was far too intent upon the Captain's face to take much notice of it. When he spoke again it was clear that he had come to a resolution, but that even he could flinch from the daring of it.

"Ah, well," says he, throwing the chart aside and taking up the well-bitten cigar, "ah, well, boys, it will have to be by the old river, after all."

Osbart and the Frenchman stepped back from the table together.

"You're mad, by ——!" says the Doctor, his eyes almost starting from his head. The "Leopard" breathed heavily as a man afraid to speak but having much to say.

"The old river!" he gasped at last. "But that is death, death, death, Captain. We go down to the tomb, the waters shall rot us in the old river. Speak again, Captain; it shall not be that."

Black rose majestically and faced them both.

"See here," he said, "it's the old river or hell

and death in a Spanish prison. It's the old river or the garrote which bursts a man's head from his neck. The old river or Devil's Island for those whose necks are left. Will you follow me through the darkness or wait until the soldiers come in? They shoot at sight, I'm told, and they carry bayonets. Will ye try the truth of that or go out by the old river? I give you twenty seconds to decide."

What rejoinder could they make to him? I doubt, indeed, if he waited for any; and this much I know for certain, that the words were hardly spoken when he turned about and smote the solid rock behind him. It opened as at a wizard's touch to reveal a heavy door of steel, and, beyond that, an orifice wherefrom there came the sound of rushing water and the voices of men.

"Except Jack-o'-Lantern the others must know nothing," the Captain said; and, upon that, he began to go down the iron ladder which the open door disclosed. And thither we followed him to the platform of the *Zero*, which lay right beneath us in as beautiful a subterranean pool as the wildest imagination has conceived.

I would have you depict this grotto as all arched over by a roof, wherefrom there depended stalactites of enormous size; not of the common limestone, as might have been expected, but of sprays and spars of a clear crystal, fashioned to these fantastic shapes I know not by what humour of the natural law.

Far beneath lay a pool of running water, bordered by a steep slope of schistous rock which caught up and mirrored the glow of many lanterns and shot back its beams of gold and green upon the stern faces of the men who worked about the ship. West of the pool it was possible to see a clear river running through a wide arch out into this natural basin; but eastward there lay a black tunnel, and it came to me immediately that by this the Captain would pass to the open sea if his daring led him so far. A voyage more terrible to the imagination was not to be thought of, and so swiftly did the dread of it creep upon my awakening mind that I shrank already from the *Zero* as from a living tomb.

Upon his part, Black had never been more unconcerned. He encouraged the men, who were lifting great packages from the river's depths, and bade them hasten. A precise habit of mind sent the Frenchman up the ladder again for the compasses we had left behind and for a book Black had bought in Paris and had not read. The hazard of the venture appeared to be forgotten altogether. His voice, splendid always, rang out without a quaver when he gave the order to "Step quick," or, "Be easy there." I saw him now at the bows, now at the aft-rail of the *Zero*, satisfying himself that this or that was done, the ship all trim, the warpings free. I searched his face in vain for the fearsome

secrets of which it should have been eloquent, but could discover thereon no testimony either of hope or despair. It remained for Osbart to be eloquent, with a madman's hoarse whisper and an anticipation of death which froze the very heart.

"There's an open grave for you, Strong," he whispered to me, clutching my arm until his finger-nails almost pierced the flesh; "there's the road to hell's gate! Look at it, man! You shall rot in that darkness until the end of time; your bones shall lie there until fire strikes the mountain and the dead come forth! That's Black, the great Captain; that's where he's leading us, into the pit, I tell you — the pit — the pit!" And he frothed at the lips as though the fires of a madman's death already tortured his brain. It was a dreadful thing to hear, and I pushed him away, but could not escape him.

"There's rushing water through the tunnel, and a cascade," he went on; "the legend tells of it; the hillmen have it in their songs. Let the ship pass through, and we will see the night and the stars; but let the rock grip her in its fangs and what then, Strong — what then? A thousand years and our bones will wash to and fro in that pit of the sea; a thousand years and our skulls will grin in the darkness of the vault. That's the great Captain, I say; that's where he's leading us. My God, into the pit of hell — the pit of hell ——"

He turned from me with a great cry which long

years of agony might have wrung from a damned soul, and, shutting the pit from his eyes, I saw him creep down the ladder toward his cabin, wherein, I did not doubt, he would drug himself to insensibility, as he had so often done before. When he was gone I heard Black commanding the hands to come aboard, and right willingly he was answered. Immediately now there were lanterns dancing upon our decks and the cry of man to man, the casting free of hawsers, the rattling of chains. With a last look about him, up at the vault as though the stars would shine upon him, down at the ship as though she were his last hope in this world, the Captain roared a long farewell to the Caves of Vares. He was jesting again when he entered the conning-tower and bade me follow him.

"Good night, my Spanish monkeys; a long good night to ye. When I come back, take care of yourselves, or your tails will be shorter, by the powers! You thought to trap me, did you? Well, here's my answer to you, lousy swine that ye are; here's my answer to ye ——"

He spat with unutterable contempt into the clear water, and so descended into the tower. If I had any consolation when I followed him it was to see our projectors throwing their monstrous beams of light once more upon the black river, and to know that they would guide us through the tunnel. Hot thoughts of our perils came crowding upon the fetid

atmosphere of the ship when the caps of steel shut us in at last; but no thought which could stifle that hope of God's heaven which lay beyond the blackness of the caverns. And to this the wide beams pointed as they searched the waters of the tunnel, and disclosed its heart as man had never beheld it since the beginning of the world.

The water in the pool was very deep, I imagine. We sank to the rim of the conning-tower, and our main window still being above the current, we went at a snail's pace toward the orifice. There was not a sound and hardly a ripple upon the mirror of the sea. When the walls of rock closed in upon us, they drew so near together that an outstretched hand could have touched them; the roof bent down ominously and forced us at last to sink entirely, and thus to shut the danger from our eyes. Upon a dial before us, a clever instrument of Guichard's designing, the fathoms were recorded, just as though a leadsman had been in the chains. I saw, to my wonder, that the river ran to a depth of fifty feet here in these narrows. Black observed this at the same time, and his spirit leaped at it. Presently, however, he took the receiver of our sea telephone into his hands, and when he had listened a little while, his brow puckered and he handed the instrument to me.

"What do you make of that, my lad?"

"A sound of rushing water, Captain, or it might be a boat moving on ahead of us."

"There'll be no boat in the river of Vares. What makes you think it's a boat?"

I told him that the sounds were not constant, and might well stand for the rise and fall of oars in the surge; at which he took the receiver back and clapped it to his own ear.

"There'll be no boat hereabout," he said almost with contempt. "The Spanish rats speak of a cascade, and that's what you're hearing. You there, Marchand! Give 'em three bells in the engine-room, and let's have more light. Be d——d to the boat; there'll be none in the river of Vares."

The bells rang out clearly, and were answered almost immediately by a great flood of white light, which pierced the dark waters as with a tremendous arrow of radiance and showed us every crevice of the tunnel. A third projector, and this of gigantic size, had been added to the other two, and its radiating beam was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in all my life. You could almost count the flakes of weed in the stream about us. Rocks became nuggets of pure gold; the roof above us was a sheen of green and silver, the sand sparkled as with the powder of crushed diamonds. Such, I say, was the picture revealed to our wondering eyes. The terror came later and not less swiftly.

Marchand, the Frenchman, was the first to perceive it, and so did the thing affright him that he

cried out aloud and clutched the Captain's arm. Upon that there comes a fearful oath to his lips, and, dragging us both to the glass, he showed us the horrible shape of a gigantic devil-fish. Such a fearsome thing in such a place, the eyes of it staring in our own, the eight arms extended as the gnarled boughs of a tree, was beyond all imagination unlooked for. For one long instant I beheld the revolting spectacle; then, in a flash, the scene was hidden; the water became black as jet; the *Zero* rocked as though a great sea had struck her.

I have many memories of this dreadful scene, but none which could convey to others the divers horrors of it or one tithe of its awful reality. Not at the first, perhaps, did it come to us that the devil-fish had gripped his arms about the rim of the conning-tower, and thus rocked us to and fro as a cradle is rocked by a woman's hand. Thrown headlong, the *Zero* rolling helplessly against the jagged rock; wild cries of terror reaching us from the engine-room; the water turned black with the filthy fluid the fish ejected; we were as men plunged into the darkness of the ultimate horror, robbed of our senses, driven to the madness of panic. And from this madness Black's voice alone recalled us. Even as write I can hear again his baying cry, "Stand fast there!" can see him holding to the iron rail before the dials, and sending his commands to the engineer. "Stand fast!" Aye, a mockery, and yet mockery which would win salvation.

The bells rang out; they were answered — I knew not how — and the propellers reversed. Slowly the *Zero* backed from the great fish and began to drag it, us it were, to the basin we had left. Thus fighting the monster, whose tentacles were as steel ropes about us, of a sudden the Captain gave the order, "Full speed ahead!" and with a rush, in which all should be lost or all won, we carried the cuttle-fish headlong and shot from the tunnel's mouth into a great vortex of the waters. It was the cascade of which the Spaniards had told us, and the heart of the earth holds no more beautiful thing.

Here from every side of a vast pit beneath the mountain the torrent fell into a cup which might have been shaped from a solid emerald, so wonderful were its hues of translucent green. Raging furiously upon the cycle of a whirlpool, the surge leaped and foamed about us, shooting its spray in whirls of froth and raining silver spindrift upon our glasses. No longer did the monster cuttle-fish blacken the water with the ink-like fluid; no longer did he drag us hither and thither in the blind ferocity of his attack. Our danger lay elsewhere. By a tunnel had we come into the basin; by a tunnel must we go out. As in some vision of a horrid sleep, I perceived the black orifice beyond the whirlpool, and asked myself what miracle even of the Captain's genius might carry us to such a gate of our salvation. The end of it all was at hand, I said. Here in this cavern

of the torrents the *Zero* and all aboard her must lie to the end of time.

If this were the logic of my despair, the frenzy of the others took a mood less acquiescent. The steel door behind us had been opened by the men in their heat of passion, and now they would have come swarming in upon us, their lips black with the burning oaths, their eyes outstanding as the horror gripped them. Drawn down by the vortex, they screamed and cried in a delirium which put the fish's tentacles about their bodies and tore them limb from limb where they stood. To such as these the thunder of the cascade was less terrible than the eyes and arms of the monster which they now perceived clearly through the glasses of the conning-tower. Beating at it with their fists, kneeling to it, striking blindly as though threat and voice would drive it off, they turned next upon Black to accuse him. He had brought them to this! Here was the end of his fine promises, this the grave of their treasure. They must die this dreadful death because he, forsooth, had not the wit to see that Vares would be their prison. When they were spent, and not before, the Captain answered them with an outburst of fury at which the brain reeled.

"Ye devil's spawn, must I waste words on such as you? Out, I say — out! Back to your holes, vermin that you are! Get ye gone before I deal with you! Get you gone, dirt and carrion, or by the Lord above me no man shall see the sun again!"

They quailed before him, shrinking from that tremendous figure of a man, and discerning his resolution in every gesture. When the Dane would have lifted a hand to strike him, I saw but the mock of a blow, and then beheld the fellow prone and bleeding on the floor, with a face so waxen that he might have been already dead. As a bolt from the blue that terrible arm had stricken him; and they dragged him back, fearful now to say a word, and yet believing surely that death was upon them. When they were gone, a black silence fell in the tower, and was unbroken save by the swirl of the foam upon the glasses. In the end that ceased, and I knew that we had sunk to the very depths of the basin, and lay in the cool, clear water of its hollow.

To such, then, had the Master brought us. And what of the dread minutes which followed after? What of Black's genius and resource? — ah, to tell you of that! For my part I had given up all hope of life, while a desire of life ran warm as blood in my veins. To think of the open sea and God's heaven of stars, to remember the home I had left, my dear friends and the youth of my days; to do this and to peer out into those merciless waters which never again should yield up their prisoners — aye, that was a torture of the soul beyond any a man may suffer even in his dreams. And to it surely we were doomed. The rock held us in its giant embrace; the cascade surged above us; the gate was barred by

chains of the foam which no ship might hope to pass. Such, I say, was my belief, when I heard the bells ring once more, and knew that we were rising. Upward and upward, the great fish still cupped upon our flank, we rose amid the thunder of the waters, until, with one mighty shout of "Full speed ahead!" one leap at the bells to ring the signal down, Black put all to the venture and raced for the orifice. And then I think that my eyes could suffer no more, and, pressing my burning hands against them, I waited for the end.

Would the *Zero* strike the rock, and be shivered as a bolt shot awry, or would she find the gate and breach it? In the agony of that doubt I heard men cry aloud. Would she find a haven, or breast the bulwark and open her plates to a wound of the water? We should know in five seconds, or in ten; and who shall wonder if we counted them, saying, "Now, now, it is coming now." As sailors who cling to a life-line when a monstrous wave threatens their ship, so we stood in the cabin. It was here, it was gone by — oh, the spell of it! And now the torrent had us, and we were carried as a feather upon a freshet, headlong in darkness, out and downward, in blackness, amid the roar of hell's voices, out to the sea and the night, out to the heaven these men derided.

The torrent had carried us beneath the mountain and brought us to the open sea. We rushed headlong to the platform, and, some calling for axes, we

fell upon the monster fish and hewed its limbs asunder. A delirium of joy seized upon the pirates. Nor were they less terrible to me in that hour of the mercy than in the blackest instant of the doom which had hovered above them.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GREEN ISLAND

We had been three days at sea, and had picked up our relief when we sighted the Green Island — Isle Verte the French call it — and there I understood that the crew were to enjoy a brief rest while the Captain paid another visit to Paris.

God knows, the men had supped upon horrors, and even such miscreants must have suffered a nausea of the soul which bade them crave for ease. None understood this better than Black. Here, on a sea-blown island off the wild coast of Brittany, he had a home made ready and a refuge to hand. Perchance should the story of his life be wholly written, it will tell of many such sanctuaries in the creeks and bays and rivers of the world — many a hiding-place in many a forgotten cave; for such was the wisdom of the man and such his foresight.

We made the Green Island, I remember, just as the day dawned; a wonderful day of the young summer breaking in radiant glory upon the wide sea and that garden of the waters whereon we were to rest. Sailing boldly into a narrow creek between gentle cliffs, the Captain passed the word to make the ship trim,

and then for all to go ashore. For the first time since I had been aboard her I saw a new miracle of Guichard's genius, by which the *Zero* could be sunk from without, and so sent to an anchorage beneath the waves without a living soul aboard her. Electric cables running from the shore to her batteries permitted her pumps to be set going and her tanks to be filled. She sank gently upon a bed of golden sand; and had twenty warships visited the island, I doubt if they would have discovered her.

I would tell you that the men had taken some of their belongings ashore, and when we had all climbed the mild slope of the cliff we came out upon a tableland of verdant grass, whereon there stood a neat white bungalow such as you may see at any south-coast watering-place. Flowers grew all about it, and it was fended from the east wind by a ring of shabby trees, turning weak limbs from the western gales which wracked them. Beyond the wood, as we learned to call it, there lay a deep pool of clear water upon the edge of the downs, which were wild and free and destitute of houses. But one farm, I learned, existed upon the Isle Verte, and that was owned by a man who would have laid down his life for Black. His name was Benoit, and his little daughter Isola was the most beautiful creature I have ever seen in all my days. But this is to get beyond the story, which brings me to the bungalow upon the height, and what we found therein.

Paris had furnished it, and the farmers of Brittany sent of their best to its table. A young Frenchman called "Mike" by the crew — I suppose his name was Michel — received us at the door and showed us to our rooms, light and cheerful all of them, and as luxurious as any man could desire. When we had bathed (even the filthy pirates were sent to the bath whenever they came ashore) we sat down to an excellent breakfast of hot coffee and fish and eggs, and were waited on both by the farmer Benoit and by the little girl of whom I have made mention. Then beer and wine were served to the crew, and they fell to singing and dancing on the grass, just like a lot of village lads at a fairing.

It was here that I found myself apart with the Captain, and had some talk with him. Taking a rugged stick in his hand and with a wideawake, such as planters wear, upon his head, he proposed that we should make a tour of the island, and I fell in with his proposition very readily.

Kind and gentle in his manner, reminding me at every word of the days when we had been adrift on the Atlantic together, I found in him the great Captain of my ideals, and wondered if all we had lived through in the dreadful days was the truth or a dream. Was it but three days ago that his guns, firing shells of flaming spirit, had burned the cruiser to the water's edge — was it but seventy hours since I had seen his enemies at Vares perishing horribly amidst the

roaring furnace of the waters — but seventy hours since his searchlight played upon their agony and the pirates thrust the fleshless limbs beneath the blood-red waves from which they were uplifted? I could not believe it as we strode the cliffs of the Green Island and our feet crushed the marigolds to powder. And yet, God knows, it was true.

"Ye would be anxious about your friends," he put it to me, as he lighted a cigar and offered me another. I told him immediately that my first thought had been of them since the day we quitted Ice Haven. He nodded his head as though he were with me in that.

"They'll be at Leith this day," he said; and then, with a dry laugh, "telling a fine tale to the canny Scotsmen, I'll not doubt. The week out and you may hear of them in London when I take you there."

I looked at him as though a madman were speaking.

"In London, Captain?"

"Nowhere else, my lad, if there's any truth at all in what the last despatches tell me. I go to London to see my son."

He said it so softly, almost with such pathos, that I stood there on the spot as a man who has heard the greatest thing he could ever hear in such a place. His son! Had not the lad died at Panama, and was he not buried there? What news could this be — what wild story to dupe him?

"Captain," I said, "you told me when we shared

the peril of the ship that your son was dead. Was that false, then?"

He sighed heavily and walked on very slowly, while he looked wistfully across the northern sea as though it would surrender the supreme truth of his terrible life.

"Ah, that's what I'd give my fortune to know," he said very solemnly; and for a spell we walked on in silence. Presently, however, he began to speak with unwonted animation, from a heart bursting with a desire it did not dare wholly to confess. His son! The man would have bared his head to God at last could his son have been given to him.

"My boy died in Panama, they said. I saw his grave there — you know that much, for you heard it on the ship. Well, there are those who say that the grave was empty, a trick for him to escape a man that hunted him and to get south. He worked his way, I'm told, to Lima; thence to Valparaiso, where he's been these ten years or more, rising in the Government service, and now with the revolutionaries against the President. Latterly, he's come to London, and was heard of there a month ago. Should that be true, and I shall know when I reach Paris to-morrow, I'll sail the *Zero* to Tilbury Docks if it costs the life of every man aboard her. What I fear is the trap they may have set for me. Lord, it must be that — the dead sleep, and what cry of man's shall awaken them?"

I could make no rejoinder to this; but I did not fail to perceive that his face was quite altered in that instant, and that something of nobility and of a deep and true emotion were to be read upon it. This man would have lived and died for the son whom he mourned. All the riches he possessed would have been but as dross before this human treasure he coveted so ardently. And for a son his soul now cried aloud upon that lonely western isle.

"Do you go to Paris alone, Captain?" I asked him presently.

He replied that it was so.

"Fear nothing from the men; they have had their lesson," he said. "If you see ships in the offing, keep to the house and let no man show himself. But they'll not look for me in such a place as this, and I shall be gone before the scent grows warm. When that time comes, I'll speak to you again about your own future, my lad. It's time that you and me sailed different courses, if it can be done with reason. But I'll not deny that the men will take it badly, and we must act with prudence. The Green Island will give them something else than their own skins to think about. I wish to God sometimes that I had sailed my last voyage, and could anchor for the last time in such a cove as this. But my destiny's on the sea; it calls me, sleeping or waking. I shall die on a good ship, my lad — I'd ask for nothing more."

The fresh north wind was blowing on his face while he spoke; it brought warm blood to his pale cheeks and a fire of life into his eyes. He looked across that ocean of which he was the king, and it seemed to me that no earthly power would ever win him from it. Here, upon this verdant island, was all a man might desire: the perfume of sweet flowers, the gold of wide sands, the shade of orchards, the white farmhouse in the hollow. Black cared for these things as a man for a jewel he fingers and passes on. The sea called him ever; it called him now to the son who had risen from the grave.

The Isle Verte is no more than a mile across, and you can see the mainland from the eastern heights. We walked thither over the wide table-land, and then returned to Benoit's farm, where we drank a glass of cider and had a little talk with a fine old woman whose father had served Napoleon. It was still early in the morning when we reached the cove where the *Zero* lay beneath the waters, and there we found a lugger with three fishermen in charge. By this, it appeared, Black would cross to the mainland; and when his luggage had been put aboard and he had given us his commands we all went up to the headland to see him sail. Not a ship could then be discerned upon any horizon. Northward, southward, out over the great Bay of Biscay, there was naught but the immensity of sea and sky, the blue void, and the fretting waters. And so the

great Captain left us, upon a quest which should mean life or death to those who watched him go.

This, I suppose, would have been about eight bells. I remember that the crew began to speak of dinner directly the tiny lugsail had been lost upon the horizon, and that we returned to an *al fresco* meal upon the grass before the bungalow. Here there was a wide lawn extending almost to the cliff's edge, with a little white paling at the far end of it, and about it well-kept beds all aglow with English roses and the simple flowers Black loved. The wild waters of the Bay of Biscay lay before us; the distant shores of France behind us; and here we got our dinner, served by little Isola with many a jest and many a quip which set the pirates wincing. When it was done, Osbart and I went up to the Captain's room to have a pipe together, and there we talked of the visit to Paris and of what might come after.

I found the Doctor very ill at ease, as might have been expected, and was not at all surprised that the prospect of another voyage to England filled him with dire alarm. He perceived, as I had perceived, that if the Captain's son really were alive, the *Zero* would go to him whatever the peril. Nor did he hesitate to say that if Black were mad enough to visit London, then, indeed, were all lost.

"The man has this in his character," he said, "that he would sail a thousand miles at the bidding of a grain of sentiment. But for that, my dear Strong,

there is not a Government nor a country which would stand against him. He has heard the fool's tale, told, I believe, to trap him, and he becomes as credulous as a woman. Let it be confirmed by the tricksters in Paris, and he will sacrifice everything — ship and men and money — to prove its truth. We shall go to London, and the hangman will be on the quay to meet us. I have foreseen that since the day I first set foot on the Nameless Ship. The rift was in the lute, and some day there would be no more music. Well, that day has come; I am as sure of it as of this pipe I hold in my hand."

"But none the less," said I, "you still believe in Black's genius, Osbart. If he sails to London, he will sail out again. I can see that you are not convinced ——"

He would not deny it.

"Black is a man in a million. If it were to any other port I would have some hopes for him. But, man, think of it, to London! Is not that the last act of a madman? To London — where every street lad knows his name; where the police at every corner will point the finger at him! Could any insanity beat that? You must see yourself it will be his last voyage. Ship and men and money! All staked on a trickster's tale, and he child enough to believe it."

"Where did he get the story, Osbart — was it in Paris?"

"He had it first from the captain of the relief, when we took the German liner. The London papers were full of Black's name then, and one of them said that his son had been heard of in Paris. That set Black afire. I thought he would have gone stark mad at the news. When we got to Vares, he was for Paris immediately, and there he heard the talk that a man who called himself Wilfred Black had been staying with some Peruvians at the Victor Hugo hotel, but was supposed then to be either in Berlin or in London. Wilfred was the Christian name of Black's boy, and there you have it. He'll not rest, day or night, until he knows the truth. And when he knows it, he'll take the knowledge to the scaffold with him."

He fell to that tone of half conviction as one who should say — This would be the story of any other man, but I speak of Black, and he is different. I saw that he believed it yet possible for the Captain to visit London and to escape with his life, so transcendent was the man's genius in elusion. At the same time he disbelieved wholly in the possibility of his son being alive — and here I agreed with him.

"It's a common name," I said; "there are many Blacks in England. I knew one at Harrow, who was as fine an all-round athlete as you would wish to meet. It's a thousand to one that this Wilfred Black is no relation whatever. We should try to convince him of that, Osbart."

He looked at me rather in an odd way.

"You would convince him, Strong?"

"Why not, Osbart?"

Again the sly look and the droll laugh.

"Well," he said at last, "I would have thought London your only chance of seeing your friends again."

I had not thought of it, and it took me all aback. If Black dared all and went to London, might not that be the hour of my deliverance? The hope fired me as a fever. I had not a word to say.

"Confess," he ran on, "you would not have him go to London. This fine moralist, who told the world the story of the great pirate, he would not save himself at such a price! Confess it, Strong! There lies in your heart the hope that Black will never go to London."

I would not deny it, and we left it at that. None the less, the hours which followed were alive with anxiety and doubt, and we spent most of them at the cliff's head looking across the bay for ships or turning our eyes to distant France, as though some miracle would bring the Captain back to us already. The men, for their part, behaved like boys at a fête. The grass, the flowers, the golden sands made a very Eldorado for them, and they played children's games or rolled in the fresh seas or went hand in hand about the island, garlanded with blossoms. Thus five days passed, but toward sundown upon the

sixth we espied the lugger crossing the strait; and, going down to the beach altogether, we welcomed the Captain ashore, and gave him a rousing cheer as he came among us.

His manner was grave, I thought, and when I would have spoken to him, he, to my great astonishment, thrust me aside with such a word of displeasure as I had never heard from him before. A sure instinct led me to perceive that all was changed, both his affection for me and his desire to save me from the men; and I knew that his son lived, and that we were to go to London.

To London — to the scaffold. It could not end otherwise. As he would have given his life for me, so now would he give it for that son whom he believed to be risen from the dead.

CHAPTER XXV

I AM ALONE ON THE SHIP

WE PUT to sea at four bells in the first watch, the Captain alone in the conning-tower, and Osbart and I together upon the platform. The night had fallen black dark, with heavy clouds rolling up from north-by-west, and a spatter of rain, which fell chill and cold upon the face. We pitched heavily as we left the cove, and, anon, the danger-bell rang thrice, and we knew that the *Zero* was going down for shelter. So we turned from the darkness to the warmth and and light of Osbart's cabin — and there he told me more of the voyage and of its purport.

"There's news of a Wilfred Black staying at a Strand hotel," he said, with some excitement. "The Captain's obsessed by the belief that the man is his son, and will go to London to make sure. Talk to him of the danger, and he'll ram a pistol down your throat. It's in his head to do the wildest thing he ever did — and it will be done, sure enough. As for you, Strong, my boy, look out for yourself. I won't say that he'll do you a mischief willingly — that would not be just to him; but this report has put another idol before him, and the old one is for-

gotten. Let him find the story false, and you'll be on the pedestal again. But if it's true, God help you."

"Meaning," I said, "that he will resent the very weakness which saved my life at the beginning, when they caught me on the Nameless Ship? Well, that's human nature, Osbart, and it's no good my quarrelling with it. If I have no friend on the ship —— "

"No friend!" and this was said with real feeling. "Why, man, I'd go through fire and water for you, and so would Jack-o'-Lantern. Don't speak of wanting a friend while I'm aboard —— "

It was new to me that the Doctor should hold me in this affection; and, while I turned with loathing from the crimes he had committed, I could not forget that a madman's brain impelled him, and that, when wholly sane, no more aimable companion existed. So, in a measure, his loyalty won upon my gratitude, as I did not fear to tell him.

"If it comes to that," said I, "there never was a moment since first I set foot on Black's ship when my life was not in peril. It may be that familiarity has bred contempt, Osbart. All said and done, it is you and the others who sail with him who have most to fear. What hope can there be for you in London? What chance can take the *Zero* safely up the Thames, even with Black at her helm? It's a thousand to one against you, Osbart. And if you fail — well, you're imaginative enough to know what comes after."

He did not deny it.

"A man who would sail with Black signs on with a halter about his neck," he said; "I've never hidden that from myself, fair weather or foul. We take the sweet and the bitter, and one's not to be had without the other. Sooner or later we shall all come to it, the grave ashore or the leaden jacket afloat. And, if we do, what odds? Would you die as I must die, or with your mouth full of cant and your heart a-hunger for what was never yours? I've tasted the good salt sea on the southern briner and I've tasted it on the northern. There's been hell in the heavens above me, and hell in the surge below; and I've lived through it, and come back to the old haven, and sat with the same good fellows, and numbered the bottles like shingle on the beach. What's death to me and to the others? What's it to old Thunder, who lies in the ice on Greenland's shore? Just the long, long sleep, and the sky gone black, and the heaven wanting her stars. That's death, my boy; whether you find it in London or on the high seas, that's my notion of it —— "

He laughed aloud, but his laugh was hollow, and there were drops of sweat on his brow. When I asked him what the hands would make of it, he tried to pull himself together and to answer with like bravado.

"The hands, they'd follow Black to the gate of hell! Ask them, and hear for yourself. London will be just a gaming ground to them — wine and song, theatre and hall, money to spend, and sights

to see. Speak of the police, and you may was well talk of a Punch and Judy show. If you told them death lay beyond the bridge, they'd turn a quid and ask you to trot him out. Oh, don't you worry about the hands!"

"And yet," I said, "not one of them but may swing upon a rope before another month has run."

He affected to make light of it, but the agony of mind was not to be hidden from me, while his staring eyes gazed into vacancy as though a vision of death were there. Another word and he would have been in a frenzy of madness, which would have betrayed all to the men from whom the secret was still hidden. So it lay upon me to turn his thoughts, and I spoke of other things and chiefly of Paris and of his visit there. When this was done, and we had supped together in the saloon, we went to our beds, and I lay long meditating this surprising turn and all that it might mean to me.

We were going to London, and the incredible boast would be made credible in my own city and among my own people. Out of the whorl of death and crime and darkness we were to pass to this supreme challenge, this surpassing mockery. In days fewer than the fingers of the hands could number, Black must stand face to face with that Justice he had defied, and answer to the nations. All else gave place in my mind to this inevitable truth. The great Captain was going to the death which sentiment had prepared

for him. Nothing surely could save him from that now. The *Zero* was making her last voyage, and all aboard her were surely doomed.

I could not sleep, so heavily did these thoughts press upon me. And yet I will declare that any estimate of my own salvation lay far from my reckoning. What would become of me in the hour of crisis I hardly cared to ask. Black had told me that my friends were at Leith, and my heart had leaped at the tidings. Roderick, I had said, would move heaven and earth to come at me, and yet he would not forget the story of the Nameless Ship nor believe that it was otherwise than well with me. London must stand for the city of my salvation or the city of my death. There seemed to me no middle course. Either Black would persuade them or his men would kill me.

Despite the danger of the voyage and the mad bravado of it, Black brought the *Zero* up directly the gale had abated; and when I went out to the platform on the following morning I found her carrying a number, such as British submarines display, and flying the white ensign with all the effrontery imaginable.

That such a disguise would be successful I could not doubt. Little was then known of submarines by the captains of merchantmen, and such as we passed would surely say that this was a Government ship out of Plymouth. Be that as it may, we sailed

as bold as brass up the Channel to the Eddystone, and it was not until danger threatened us from Plymouth itself that we made a long run below the sea, and did not emerge again until St. Catherine's had been left far in our wake. Then, the night being clear, with a full round moon, we lifted the hatches once more, and, all rushing to the decks, we lay there to drink in the chill, sweet air as though it were a draught from the well of life itself.

I remember that the sea was decked out with ships at this time, their red and green lanterns shining prettily in the lagoons of shadow.

Some of them passed us so closely that we could have tossed a biscuit aboard. One great liner in particular, a German, I think, bore down upon us menacingly, and was a very fortress of light and movement. From her decks there came the lilt of a sonorous orchestra, playing, I remember, a waltz of Strauss's, as only Germans can. This ship saluted us, and was answered back with all the precision and ceremony you would have found upon a Government vessel. When she was gone we passed some herring boats from Shoreham, and then a timber hulk, with three masts, sagging heavily to the swell. A little while after this some one cried out that a distant light was that of Newhaven, and very shortly we sighted Beachy Head, and knew that the real danger of our voyage was but beginning.

Often have I wondered what would have been said

aboard those passing vessels had they been told that the shadow upon the hither sea was that of Black's ship, and that he himself was aboard her. What panic and terror would have followed that alarm! What a race for a haven! What a wild speeding of the news! But so it is ever in life that reality passes by us in the shadows which our self-assurance casts. All the world rang then with the story of Vares and the great Captain's death, yet here he was at the very mouth of the Thames, saluted by those who should have taken him, and honoured, I doubt not, for the flag he flew. And to-morrow the world would say, "If we had known; if — if!"

We sighted the Nore light on the fourth day after leaving the island, at three bells in the middle watch, and went below immediately, as I had expected we should do. Whatever brazen courage might win for us on the open waters of the Channel, assuredly it could win nothing here. Now there must begin a threading of the sands and the banks of the estuary, which was perilous beyond all imagination. Let us be detected but for one instant by any boat, either the launch of the Customs or of the medical officers, and that must be the end of us. Such a plain fact sent Black to the Thames in the watches of the night, and kept him below for many hours together. When the signal rang out for us to ascend I learned, not without surprise, that a morning fog had come down upon the river, and, going out to the platform, I

found that I could hardly see my hand before my face. Nor did I discover immediately that the Captain walked the deck with me, and that we were alone.

Depict a world of white and rolling vapour, above which there hovered so still an air that a man might have been afraid to whisper. Far away beyond that veil of fog lay the heights of London, the ramparts of the mighty city then waking to the life of the new day. As in the echoes of a dream I heard the voice of London calling to me through the black silence of the swirling waters, and the devouring fog, and the rumour of ships. More than once my heart leaped as a siren's hoot burst upon my ear, to wax loud and bellicose and diminish again until it became but a murmur of soft sounds. I heard the sound of a railway whistle, and it seemed to say that I had been summoned from the lonely sea to this water-gate of England, there to be mocked and tortured by false hope as man has rarely been in all the years. I saw the shadows of vast steamers thrown upon the curtain of the mists, and could have cried aloud to them to deliver me from this prison, for such was the impulse born of the discovery. Yesterday I had been content to be the passive spectator of the mad life; but this call from my own land reached me in clarion tones, and nothing but the sudden coming of the Captain held me to that place or saved me from myself.

I see his majestic figure now, great and terrible and menacing, as he emerged from the dripping cloud

of fog, and stood at my side to question me. Very thoughtful, harassed, and weary, he asked me what I knew of the Thames and how far I judged us to be from the shore. When I told him a quarter of a mile at a hazard, he seemed to agree with me and to be pleased that he could do so.

"Aye," he said, "the young ears want no tuning. Yon's Canvey Island, and you hear the trains to London. Well, my lad, we'll be there to-night, though it's little of that same city I may show you. Let me tell you so right now and have done with it."

I was surprised to hear this, for he had as good as promised me my liberty in London; and so I told him. His rejoinder was not a little callous, and it cut me to the quick.

"The men won't have it," he said, with a shrug. "There's not one of them would sail with me while a mouthpiece ashore was telling of their doings. So, my lad, for better or worse, it's the *Zero* while I command her. Maybe it won't be for long. Should yon city give me what I am seeking, I go to play a new part in the world, and the sea will know me no more. When that day comes, you and I will say a long good-bye. Ask, then, that it may be soon, for your own sake."

I saw that he was deeply moved, and perchance, but for the ship's need, some word of mine would have broken so harsh a resolution. But it befell that Jack-o'-Lantern came up at the moment to take

soundings, and Black turned from me with an anxiety even his iron will could not conceal. A quarter of an hour later we were almost at the bottom of the river again; and so, creeping from bank to bank all that long morning, we came at length to anchor at about three bells in the afternoon watch, and lay for many hours with the swift current drumming upon our windows.

I must tell you that Black shut me from the conning-tower during this voyage down the Thames, and so I learned little either of the means whereby the ship was steered or of the exceeding skill which brought her at last to a safe anchorage. Concerning the latter, a brief talk to Osbart at the luncheon table led me to imagine that the Captain had purchased an ancient wharf situated upon one of the creeks near Tilbury, and that a private dock would harbour the *Zero* during her brief stay in the river. More the Doctor would not say, nor did I press him to do so, for it was clear that a premonition of ill sat heavily upon him, and that it now afflicted the crew so sorely that a word ill spoken would have brought them headlong upon me. Already there were ominous mutterings and whispered threats among them, and so hostile was their attitude as the day went on that I shut myself in my cabin, and there waited for any fortune that might come to me. An hour later I discovered that I was alone upon the ship, and, running out to the saloon, I think that I fell senseless, so overwhelming was the terror of it.

Alone upon the *Zero!* Alone in the depths of the black river, the prisoner of the swift-running water! Who shall wonder that my very soul was withered, my reason shaken to its depths by that dread discovery! They had left me aboard the ship to perish miserably, and this was the way of their vengeance.

Running hither and thither, beating my hands upon the steel roof above me, crying out to them to have pity, I strove blindly with the fate that threatened me. Visions of death, horrible and revolting, crowded upon me, and would not be thrust back. I saw myself perishing miserably of hunger, living unnamable days of agony, dying alone in the most terrible prison the wit of man has devised. And at that I think the last thread of my courage went snap, and I lay for many hours afraid to look fate in the face.

They say that there is mercy in this human capacity of suffering; that the mind is alert to impressions of pain and fear to a certain degree; but, when that is passed, stupor follows. I would bear witness that so it befell upon the *Zero* in that awful hour. A delirium of terror was followed by an hour almost of languorous indifference. Methodically and with brain benumbed, I went again from cabin to cabin of the *Zero* to be sure that none of the crew remained aboard and that I was indeed alone. The thing proved and my situation exposed beyond all doubt, I returned to my cabin and sat down to reckon with the situation, as a man to a chess-board where the figures are human.

They had left me and gone ashore, I said. Fearing me for the first time since I had been his prisoner, Black held me captive here while he pursued his scheme and sent the men to those debaucheries with which their perils were rewarded.

Should all go well with him, I did not doubt that he would soon return to give me my liberty; but, should ill befall him, what then? I asked. Would the crew dare to return to the *Zero* if the Captain were taken? Would she not lie here in this lonely dock, hidden from human eyes, until some chance of destiny discovered her? And, if that were so, what of my own fate, unless — and at that my heart beat — unless I myself could raise her? Death, beyond all question unnamable, such must be my end.

I say that my heart leaped at a certain thought, and this is no wild talk. No sooner had it come to me than I ran wildly to the engine-room, and flung myself down the ladder, as though the key to my liberty lay at the foot of it. One lamp burned here, and by its dim light I could distinguish the great board of the switches, and the cylinder of the pump, and the steel shafts going out to the propellers. With trembling fingers I tried the connections, and listened for an answer with the ear of a man whose last hope is in the answering word. When there was no movement, when the chill, cold machinery mocked me by its stillness, I saw that the great batteries had been shut off and all the arteries of their life run dry. The

clock of the switch upon the board was a mockery anew. I stood as in the silence of a judgment to hear the river falling upon the plates and to understand the measure of this supreme rebuff. These devils had trapped me surely; the hand of God alone could snatch me from that tomb.

Long hours passed upon this, and left me without any sense of time or place. If there were intervals of a black delirium when I flung myself to the steel floor and swore I would not die, intervals when the phantoms of a dire mental agony hovered about me and drove me to a madman's outburst, by these I would pass to the better moments of reason and submission. Death had come to me as the king of terrors, but my manhood bade me face him with all the courage I could wring from my tortured soul. And to death I bent my head in the silence of my cabin, where the minutes were numbered as with a voice of doom, and the waters mocked me as they surged upon my window and seemed to say, "Nevermore."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GREAT CAPTAIN PUTS OUT TO SEA

I HAD looked at my watch to discover that it was five minutes past eleven o'clock, though whether of the night or the day I did not know.

For some hours I lay in a heavy trance of sleep, wherein the terror of the truth still affected me, but would not stir me from my bunk. All the reality of my prison, the unspeakable cruelty of it, and that which imagination superadded, remained and were with me in my dreams. I heard the waters falling about the *Zero*, could depict the black depths of the river in which she lay, and see myself lying there as in a coffin of steel until the very plates were rusted and the waters gave up their dead.

But I warred no longer with such a fate, and, commending my soul to God, I slept.

I say that I had looked at my watch, and this is to tell of the breaking of my dream. Profound as the trance had seemed, the ears remained intent despite it, and they had warned me. A tremor seized upon the *Zero*, and she stirred at her moorings. It was hardly repeated when I sprang to my feet, and, taking a heavy stick in my hands, beat upon the

plates of steel as though I would burst them. My God! if they had heard me, I said; if this were the finger of my destiny thus writing upon the surface of the waters!

And the watch told me that it was five minutes past eleven o'clock, though whether of the night or the day I knew not.

Oh, bear with me while I speak of this, when that tremor of life vibrated through the sleeping ship, and I believed that she stirred. Bear with me as I ran headlong from the cabin and bent my ear to listen, and cried aloud that they might come to me. Bear with me during the instants of suspense when I knew not whether the waters lied or beat upon the steel as the heralds of truth. The *Zero* moved, I said; they had started her engines from above.

There are moments in a man's life of which no words shall tell fitly, and this was one of them. While I could hear the pumps humming in the engine-room, while the *Zero* lurched now to this side, now to that, as though heavy seas were breaking upon her, I remained incredulous. It was a trick anew whereby I must suffer again, a thought to torture me, an hallucination of my sleep. I shut my eyes, put my fingers into my ears, and staggered from the place. A lie, I said; and yet a cold wind blowing sweetly upon my face mocked me, and, all my senses reeling, I understood that the hatch was off, and that a man was speaking to me.

"Master Strong, Master strong, will I have a word with you?"

A man bent down from the platform and thrust a lantern into my face. He was Jack-o'-Lantern, blind with drink and staggering in his gait. What more he would have said, what message he carried to me, I shall never know until the end of time. A horror of the pit defying all reason, a desire of life and light and God's heaven above me, gave me the strength of ten such as he and sent me to his throat. And then — ah, God — and then I won the open. Inch by inch I fought my way to the platform, the man imploring me to hear him, I mad with my desire, and seeing the dark waters and the lights beyond them, seeing these and hearing from afar the city's voice, I plunged headlong into the river, and was gone from him.

Oh, the wild wonder of it, the breeze upon my brow, the cool waters lapping my mouth, the distant lights calling me as to a goal where all should be won! Of place or people, of all that happened about me, of steamers looming up in the darkness and going by, I knew nothing nor cared. There were the clear lights upon the farther bank, and they called me as to a gate of my home. Made strong by peril and suffering, I swam with lengthening strokes which cleared the frothing wavelets and bore me swiftly to the shore. The goal was mine, and nothing now could keep me from it.

I remember a monstrous barge, and beyond it an open road; I can recollect an instant when I said that the lights were those of a railway, and that the sounds I heard were of a train rumbling on to London. But those impressions were forgotten at the last; and, thinking only of the shore, I thrust out my hands to the chain which held the barge, and cried aloud that I was free.

For an instant I stood poised upon the prow to which I had climbed, and looked back upon the river. There were little banks of mist drifting down toward the city, but in a clear space between them, and as though it were a vision of the night, I saw the *Zero* and the great Captain alone upon her deck.

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